Issue 415

WebUser

25 Jan - 7 Feb 2017

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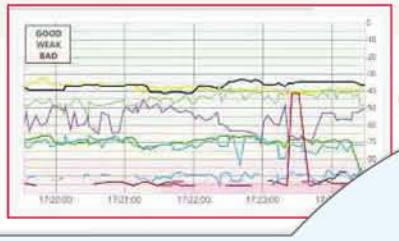
Superb NEW tools – get them 3 months before everyone else

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SPEED IT UP! Fix the 14 most common problems – starting with this

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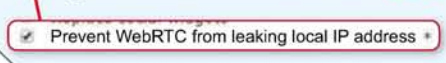
BACK-UPS: DOUBLE YOUR PROTECTION

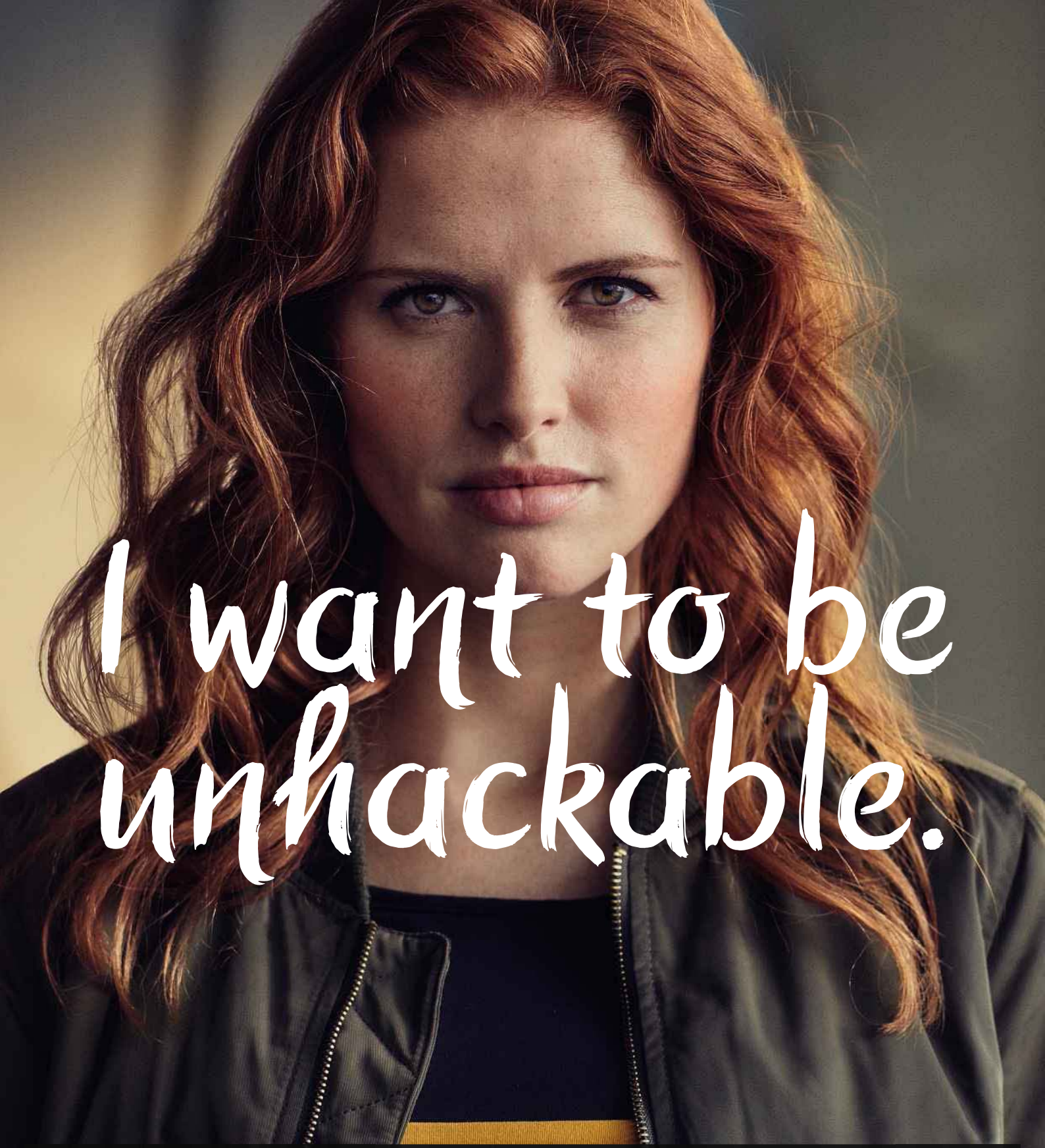
Real-time syncing to the web

Stop Hackers Stealing Your IP Address



The NEW setting you must switch on p56







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WebUser GOLD AWARD

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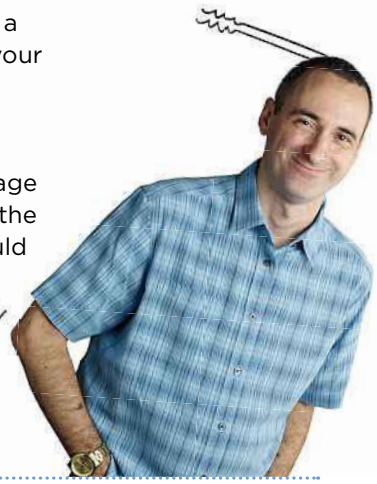
Make your Wi-Fi whizzier

A good internet connection should be like Billy Whizz from the *Beano*: racing around the house, breaking through walls and impervious to rain, snow and the threat of a good slippering. Sadly, wireless routers – even those with similar antennae to Billy – aren't quite as reliable and even super-speed broadband can yield a slow, weak signal that leads to buffering when streaming and suffering when browsing.

In this issue's cover feature (page 38), we reveal the most common causes of woeful Wi-Fi and explain how to resolve them. Our advice covers everything from tweaking your router's hidden settings to creating a heat map of 'dead spots', and stopping your neighbours hogging your bandwidth.

Also, on page 20 we review Netgear's new Orbi system, which claims to make dead spots a thing of the past; and on page 57 we explain how to always connect to the fastest Wi-Fi networks. All of which should make your Wi-Fi more Billy Whizz than Walter the Softy.

Robert Irvine
robert_irvine@dennis.co.uk
#webuser



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Average sales, Jan-Dec 2015, 29,463 copies per issue

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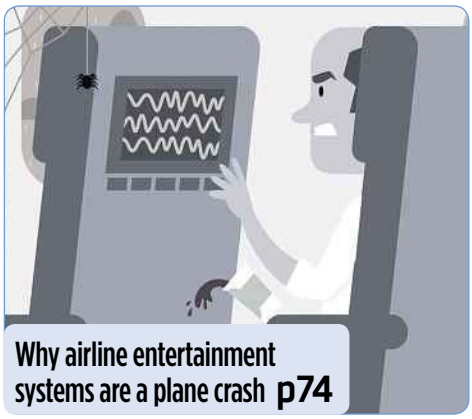
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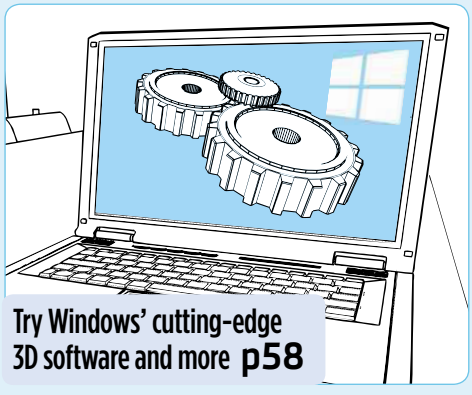
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What's New Online

Control Microsoft's privacy settings

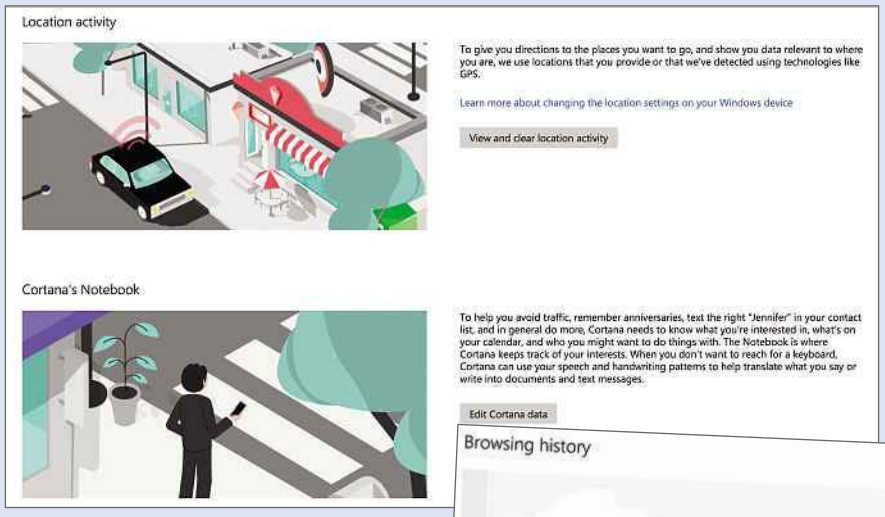
In an effort to allay Microsoft users' concerns about privacy, its new web-based dashboard gives you greater control over what the company knows about you. This includes your browsing history, which – if you use Cortana – is sent to Microsoft and used to improve the voice-assistant's performance.

You can view and clear your browsing history through the dashboard, although it will still be stored on your computer. You can also delete your Bing search history and location activity, using a map to see all the GPS data Microsoft has collected about you.

Once you've done that, you can delve into Cortana's notebook to find out what information it has gathered about your interests. Microsoft says it collects this data so that it can better translate what you say or write. By clicking categories ranging from finance to sports, you can see what data Cortana holds and clear the lot in one go.

Finally, there's an option to monitor your health records, which Microsoft stores in its HealthVault feature. It's eye-opening stuff.

account.microsoft.com/privacy



Play Neflix-inspired games

flixarcade.netflix.io

If you watched *Stranger Things* on Netflix, you may have been charmed by its nods to Eighties pop culture. Now you can go a step further by playing this quirky 8-bit retro game inspired by the series. It's hardly sophisticated, but you can have a lot of fun as you press the spacebar to leap over obstacles and enemies while collecting lots of power-ups, accompanied by a soundtrack of the show's theme music. Can you beat our score of 409? It's not the only Netflix game on offer here, either: you can also play titles themed around *Orange is the New Black*, *Marco Polo* and *Narcos*, each of which has its own backdrop, theme tune and quirks.

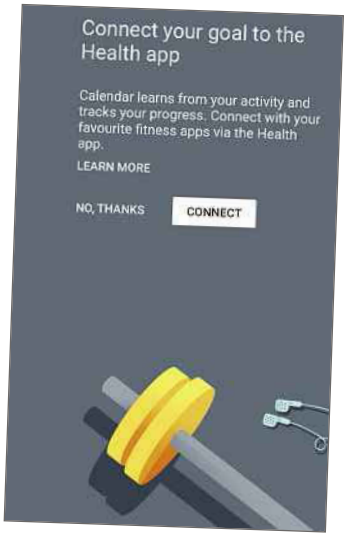


Stick to your 2017 fitness goals

calendar.google.com

Maintaining a fitness regime isn't always easy, but Google Calendar hopes to keep you on the straight and narrow with a host of improvements to the Goals feature it introduced last April. These make it easier than ever to record your progress.

You can now connect Google Fit and Apple Health to your calendar's fitness goals using the Android and iOS apps. Then you simply get on with your exercise, and your Calendar will mark your goals as done without you having to lift a further finger. The idea is that your achievements will motivate you to continue, and you won't have to remember to keep a log. To make the process even easier, Google Calendar includes a visual performance tracker, which the company says will help you find the best time to exercise.



We pick the 10 best things you must do on the web this fortnight

Get alerts for Google Doodles

bit.ly/doodle415

You probably already visit Google every day, but if you enjoy seeing the doodles it creates for special occasions, you can now receive notifications through Google's Android app when a new one arrives. To receive alerts, turn on the option at the top of the Settings menu. You can also view past doodles at www.google.com/doodles.





See what others search for online

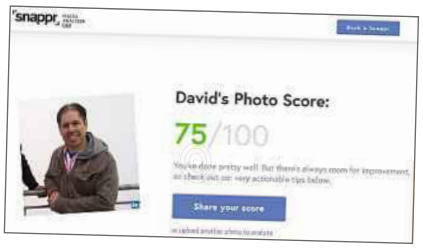
mysterysear.ch

Search engines usually deliver results based on terms other people have typed, but Mystery Search shows you pages based on what the person *before* you typed, so there's no way of knowing what you're actually going to get. Although it has no real practical purpose, it's fascinating to use, and many people are taking full advantage by entering some very odd queries for others to discover. However, it can also be hijacked by more extreme pranksters, so be wary if you're using it at work!

Rate your LinkedIn profile picture

bit.ly/snappr415

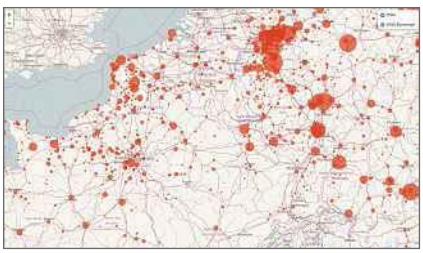
Are you worried that your LinkedIn profile picture doesn't quite portray you in the most professional light? If so, you may want to run it through Snappr's photo analyser. It scans your shot and gives an overall score out of 100 based on your smile, jawline and facial expression, and by checking the background, your use of the rule of thirds and the quality of the image. It then gives you pointers as to how you can improve your photo. Do you rate higher than our 75/100? Let us know!



View a map of Allied bombing in Europe

bit.ly/bomb415

This map reveals the extent of the Allied bombing of the European mainland during World War Two. Using data from the US and Royal air forces between 1939 and 1945, together with information from missions carried out by Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, it uses red dots of different sizes to show the total tonnage of the bombs dropped on each location.



5 TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER

@2017hull
Keep up to date with what's on in this year's UK City of Culture, Hull

@guardianobits
Learn about the lives of the recently deceased through the Guardian's obituaries

@brits
The Brit Awards are back on 22 February so get the latest musical gossip in advance

@ahencyclopedia
A daily look at ancient history and culture from around the world

@bbcbreaking
We reckon 2017 will be particularly newsy – the BBC has you covered

Go Live with Facebook Pages

bit.ly/pages415

As well as streaming live video to Facebook from a phone, you can now broadcast from your browser. It only works for Pages, but you can pin comments to the broadcast and give videos a permanent link.

See how fake news spreads

hoaxy.iuni.iu.edu

It's hard to know what to believe on social media, so Hoaxy shows you how far unverified stories are spreading. Type in a term and it will look for false news articles that contain those words. Click a story to see how far it has spread.

Browse the most edited Wikipedia pages

bit.ly/wiki415

Wikipedia has released details of 2016's most-edited pages. At the top was 'Deaths in 2016', which was edited 18,230 times. Second place, Donald Trump's page, received half as many edits, at 8,933.

Need to Know

ISPs send warning letters to illegal downloaders

What happened?

ISPs in the UK have finally started sending letters to customers who download copyrighted material illegally, in an attempt to dissuade them.

The plans have been years in the making, having first been unveiled as part of the Digital Economy Act, which was rushed through Parliament in 2010. Letters were initially expected to be sent in 2011, but debates and court cases over who should pay for them delayed the project. Now that those issues have apparently been sorted out, ISPs including BT, Virgin Media, TalkTalk and Sky have started warning customers who repeatedly flout the law.

The letters are only educational, with no threat of sanctions or fines, so don't panic if you receive one. The situation is reminiscent of reports from several years ago when lawyers sent letters demanding payment for pirated material. These so-called 'speculative invoices' were sent to people whose broadband accounts appeared to have been used to download a specific film or piece of adult content illegally, and demanded hundreds of pounds in payment. If you didn't pay, the lawyers threatened court action. However, they failed to take anyone to court, and the practice was quietly dropped.

How will it affect you?

Unlike those speculative invoices, these missives from ISPs contain no demands for payment. Instead, a sample letter suggests they'll simply flag up the fact that someone using the broadband connection has been spotted downloading content illegally.



Get it Right from a Genuine Site aims to dissuade web users from online piracy



The messages are designed to inform people that someone they live with is misbehaving online, or to alert less tech-savvy web users that the site they're downloading from isn't above board, in case they were unaware. The letters also aim to highlight legal alternatives in the hope that users will make better decisions next time.

The letters may refer to something called 'Get it Right from a Genuine Site' (www.getitrightfromagenuinesite.org). This is a government-backed campaign run by lobby group Creative Content UK through which copyright owners are sending the letters.

If you receive a letter, you needn't panic. There's no bill attached, and ISPs aren't threatening to cut off your broadband. It's also worth remembering that it's possible no-one at your home has been downloading illegally – sometimes the IP address system can't accurately determine who is attached to which connection. So if your offspring or spouse say it wasn't them, they may be telling the truth.

What do we think?

Not only are the letters too little too late, they were never likely to have much effect without some form of punishment to back them up. What's more, the campaign only targets people who download from peer-to-peer sites, when much piracy has shifted to direct downloads, streaming services and set-top-boxes equipped with systems such as Kodi (kodi.tv) to search for unofficial copies of films and TV series.

The letters won't be news to many peer-to-peer users – after all, most so-called pirates are aware that what they're doing isn't entirely legal. While pointing out that their ISP knows what they're up to may have a chilling effect on some, without any sanction it seems unlikely that they would stop. Meanwhile, the inaccuracy of identifying people by IP address makes it unfair to fine users or cut off their broadband.

What can be done to cut down on piracy? We'd argue that the best method is to offer alternatives that are easy to use and relatively low-cost. Many people happily pay to stream music from Spotify and watch video through Netflix – it's simply easier for most of us than tracking down an illegal stream.

These letters have been delayed for too long and fail to address modern forms of piracy, and there's no real reason to obey them. It's hard to imagine that people who have been pirating music and video throughout the seven years the Digital Economy Act has been in force will stop now.

We'll take a closer look at the legal aspects of using Kodi in our next issue.

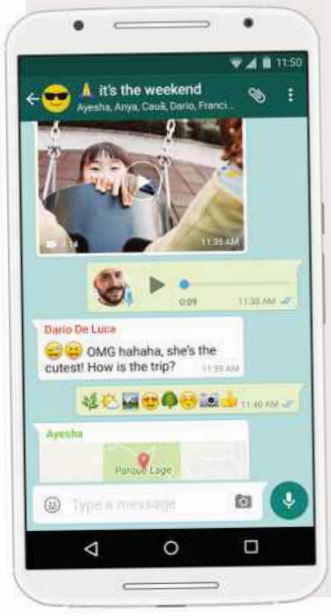
What we think of this fortnight's top tech news stories and rumours, and how they affect you

WhatsApp flaw raises security concerns

What happened?

A security researcher reported a flaw in the encryption system of messaging app WhatsApp, and suggested that the weakness made it possible for the company to read users' chats. The problem affects the way the system generates security keys, particularly for messages sent to offline users. This means WhatsApp could in theory intercept a message, read it, encrypt and resend it without the receiver knowing – unless security notifications had been switched on first.

Other security researchers have disputed the seriousness of the flaw, however, and WhatsApp denied that it was a "backdoor" created to give governments access to users' messages. The company said it was simply the result of a trade-off between usability and watertight security.



How will it affect you?

WhatsApp users should be aware that the messaging system's encryption isn't perfect and that, in extreme conditions, your messages could be read. It's a problem few of us are likely to face, because our lives are of little interest to security services, but it's worth understanding that there are limits to security.

If you'd rather use a messaging system that doesn't suffer from this issue, consider Signal – it uses the same encryption tools as WhatsApp but without the flaw. Those who want to stick with WhatsApp can opt to be notified about key changes by going to Account, Security and clicking Show Security Notifications. Receiving a notification doesn't mean you've been hacked, only that an encryption key has changed, but it's good to be warned.

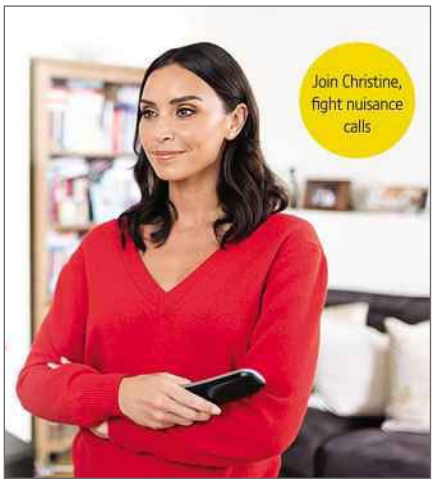
What do we think?

Security issues can be baffling to the layman. On one hand, it's important that people understand the limitations of the security systems that protect messaging apps and other services. On the other, it would be better for such information to be reported in a calm, clear manner.

Although most of us don't need to worry about this news, the app is used by government officials, journalists and activists, so it's important they're aware of encryption's limitations.

BT cracks down on nuisance calls

What happened?



Are you sick of receiving unsolicited phone calls about PPI and other insurance claims? BT wants to help. The telecoms giant has unveiled a new system that lets customers divert unwanted calls to a 'junk voicemail box', which works in a similar way to a spam filter for email.

BT's Call Protect Service will be free for BT phone customers. Once activated, BT's network-analysis tools will divert calls from numbers it suspects are being used by nuisance callers. BT spots these by looking for numbers that make excessive volumes of calls or engage in other suspicious activity.

How will it affect you?

Any BT landline customer can sign up for Call Protect for free by visiting www.bt.com/callprotect or calling BT on 0800 389 1572. Once activated, the system automatically diverts calls from any numbers on BT's blacklist to your 'junk mail' voicemail, which you can check to make sure no legitimate calls have been filtered by mistake. You can also set up diversions for specific categories of calls, such as those from withheld numbers.

If a spam caller manages to slip through BT's net, you can add the number to a personal blacklist by dialling 1572 after receiving the call. If enough customers complain about the same number, BT will add it to its own blacklist.

What do we think?

BT's research suggests that the Call Protect system could divert up to 30 million spam calls every week, and we can only thank the company for taking action. Such calls are a daily annoyance for anyone whose number has ended up on a list and has had to put up with robot callers shilling PPI rebates and scammers trying to convince them that their computer needs expensive technical support.

It's only a pity that the system is limited to BT customers – we'd love to see it shared with other providers, or for those companies to develop similar tools to help keep the pests off our phones.

NHS trust suffers huge cyber-attack

What happened?

Barts Health NHS Trust ruled out a ransomware attack on its systems, but confirmed that a cyber-attack has potentially put its patients' data at risk. The hospital trust sent staff an email warning that engineers were investigating a ransomware attack, according to the Health Service Journal (HSJ, bit.ly/health415).

A spokeswoman told tech-news site IT Pro: "Ransomware was [initially] a possibility, however now at this later stage in our investigation we don't believe ransomware is involved." The trust has not been able to establish what kind of cyber-attack it has suffered, and has had to take some drives and systems offline during an ongoing investigation.



HSJ reported that the cyber-attack affected thousands of files stored on computers running the out-of-date Windows XP operating system. Nine out of 10 NHS trusts still rely on XP, despite Microsoft ending support for it in April 2014, according to a Freedom of Information (FoI) request conducted in October 2016, and published in December.

Another FoI request last year suggested cybercriminals had targeted at least 28 NHS trusts with ransomware in the previous 12 months, seeking to lock access to patient data until the trusts paid a fee. NHS Digital, the body that oversees cybersecurity for the health service, said no ransom was ever paid and no data was lost.

How will it affect you?

If you're a Barts Health NHS Trust patient, you'll be understandably concerned about this cyber-attack and the risk of your medical data falling into the wrong hands. But this is merely the latest in a series of attempted hacks on NHS trusts, which means we should all be worried, not to mention dismayed that the NHS is still using the unsafe Windows XP. Hopefully this attack will persuade NHS bosses to ramp up the security of their systems to protect our personal information.

What do we think?

As we discussed in a similar news story in Issue 413 ('NHS Trusts still use Windows XP'), we acknowledge the cost and difficulty of upgrading millions of NHS devices to a more secure operating system, but the latest attack emphasises the need to do so sooner rather than later. We can only breathe a sigh of relief that Barts' computers weren't infected with ransomware – the next time, the NHS might not be so lucky. Sort it out, Jeremy Hunt!

FIRST LOOK

HTC U Ultra

bit.ly/htcu415



HTC has struggled to keep up with its rivals in the past few years, producing phones that have veered from the gimmick-laden Ultra Pixel camera HTC One M8 to the mediocre M9, and on to the solid but overpriced HTC 10. This year, the firm has gone back to gimmicks again, adding a second screen to its flagship HTC U Ultra. This second display runs across the top of the phone's huge 5.7in screen and shows notifications and shortcuts to apps you commonly use, whether the main screen is on or off.

As well as the extra screen, what lifts the HTC U Ultra above the average high-end smartphone is its ability to understand more about you and your needs. HTC is calling it artificial intelligence, which is pushing it a bit because what it's building is more akin to the kind of machine learning that Apple uses to recommend apps you might want to use at particular times.

The assistant software behind this, HTC Sense Companion, learns from your behaviour over time and provides you with smart reminders, such as notifying you to charge the phone if it thinks it's going to run out of battery before you get home. The device also uses four always-on microphones to deliver superior performance for voice-activated services.

We were able to spend a little time with both the HTC U Ultra and the lower-spec HTC U Play at this year's CES (see more CES gadgets in FAQ, page 36), and we feel the company has certainly delivered a great-looking phone. Its 'liquid surface' coloured glass is reminiscent of the glass and metal design of the iPhone 7, and could prove a credible rival to Apple's device. But we'll only know for sure when we've had a chance to test it in full and know how much it costs.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Is Yahoo changing its name to Altaba?



A filing at the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has revealed that Yahoo plans to change its name to Altaba following the completion of its buy-out by US telecommunications company Verizon. However, sources said many of its products, including Yahoo Mail, its search engine and fantasy sports apps, will keep the Yahoo brand.

Other major changes to the company's structure include the resignations of CEO Marissa Mayer and founder David Filo, according to the notice posted on the authority's website.

Yahoo sold its core internet business, which includes its email, websites and apps – formerly known as RemainCo – to Verizon for $4.83bn (£3.97bn) last year. It's thought the deal will close in the coming weeks, which is why the changes to its structure have been announced.

There's still some scepticism about whether the acquisition will go ahead following the revelation of two serious data breaches at Yahoo over the last 12 months. However, neither company has revealed whether the hacks will affect the purchase and this latest news would seem to confirm that the deal will go ahead as planned.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

It's important to understand that only the investment part of Yahoo's business is being rebranded as Altaba – a name some experts believe was chosen because of its similarity to the Chinese search engine Alibaba, which Yahoo owns a large chunk of. However, the change does little to conceal the mess that Yahoo is currently in, with dwindling profits and frequent security breaches. That Yahoo's products will be retaining their name and not rebranded as, for example, Altaba Mail is unlikely to provide much comfort to its users.

GO What's new on Indiegogo

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Gary 2.0

bit.ly/gary415 | From £9



In Issue 405, we promoted a Kickstarter project called Gary, which prevents your earphones from tangling by retracting them into a portable case. Now, Gary's back and has clearly been on a diet – measuring just 5.8 x 1.8cm – so it can be slipped into your pocket even more easily. Gary 2.0 is available in two colours: 'titan gray' and 'get black', and works in the same way: just tuck in your cable and watch it wind in. Gary's team hopes to raise £10,000 by 10 February.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Fire-extinguishing battery developed

Researchers have designed a new lithium-ion battery which contains a fire-retardant material that's released if the battery gets too hot. It can extinguish a fire in 0.4 seconds. It's thought the battery in Samsung's Note 7 was to blame for the smartphones catching fire, although no official report has been released.



Opera launches new concept browser

Opera's new experimental browser, Neon, offers a range of fun features including the option to drag and push things around and even pop content out of the web and save it.

WE DON'T LIKE...

Nintendo reveals high price of Switch

Part home console, part handheld device, the Nintendo Switch will be available for £289 from 3 March, making it Nintendo's most expensive UK launch to date. Its games are expected to cost as much as £60.



Android has most security vulnerabilities

Google's Android has topped a list of products with the most reported vulnerabilities in 2016, ahead of Linux and Adobe Flash. The list, compiled by CVE Details, attributed 523 known security flaws to the mobile operating system.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

SECURITY ALERT! | What's been bothering us this fortnight

Hackers can steal fingerprints from photos



Researchers at Japan's National Institute of Informatics (NII) have warned that photos featuring fingertips could pose a security risk, with hackers capable of recreating fingerprints from little more than a peace sign. According to NII professor Isao Echizen, camera technology has progressed to the point where photos taken from up to three metres away could be used to glean specific biometric information about an individual.

"Just by casually making a peace sign in front of a camera, fingerprints can become widely available," Echizen told Japanese paper *Sankei Shimbun*. "Fingerprint data can be recreated if fingerprints are in focus with strong lighting in a picture."

Echizen and other researchers at the NII were able to recreate fingerprints taken by digital cameras, and have said that it can be done without the need for any advanced technology.

This isn't the first time in recent years that the theft of biometric data from photos has been demonstrated. In 2014, hacker Jan 'Starbug' Krissler was able to use a high-definition photo to copy German defence minister Ursula von der Leyen's fingerprints. "After this, politicians will presumably wear gloves when talking in public," he joked at the time.

bit.ly/fingerprints415

Ransomware disguised as job application

Security company Check Point has uncovered a ransomware attack that poses as a legitimate job application. The email is sent with a harmless PDF covering letter and an Excel spreadsheet that contains the ransomware. When the victim opens the Excel spreadsheet, they are invited to enable content so that macros can run. Upon receiving the go-ahead, the malicious commands launch a program that encrypts all the files on the user's computer and presents the message: YOUR_FILES_ARE_ENCRYPTED.TXT.



While the files are being encrypted, the user is presented with a fake 'chkdsk' screen urging them not to turn off their PC. Once the process is complete, they will see a skull and crossbones and a message telling them their files have been encrypted using GoldenEye, with instructions on how to pay the ransom and unlock their files. The rates to unlock files start at 1.3 Bitcoins (£800) per infection.

bit.ly/goldeneye415

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: David Emm, principal security researcher at Kaspersky Lab (www.kaspersky.co.uk)

Q What's the best way to create a strong password that I'll actually be able to remember?

Shannon Power, via email

A It is possible to create strong, memorable passwords that don't use personal data. Instead of trying to remember individual passwords, start with a fixed component and apply a simple scrambling formula. For example: start with the name of the online resource – such as 'mybank' – then apply a formula:

- **Capitalise the fourth character**
- **Move the second last character to the front**
- **Add a chosen number after the second character**
- **Add a chosen non-alphanumeric character at the end.**

This would give you a password of 'nm1ybAk?'.

Or, instead of using the name of the online resource as the fixed component, you could create your own passphrase and use the first letter of each word. So if your passphrase is 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' the fixed component of each password starts out as 'tqbfjotld'. Then apply your four-step rule.

> "Start with a fixed component and apply a simple scrambling formula"



By using either of these methods, you can ensure you have a unique password for each online account, which will be secure against the type of breach that makes use of previously gained personal information.

If all this sounds too complicated, you should consider using a password manager – software that automatically creates complex passwords for you, keeps them secure and automatically enters them when you need to log in.

+ Email us your security questions at webuser@dennis.co.uk



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BT

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

TECHNOLOGY

NEW

Nikon 100th Anniversary

www.nikon.com/100th

Camera manufacturer Nikon celebrates its centenary in July and this stylish website offers a great snapshot of its history. Using a mix of video, images and text, it showcases the company's past innovations and landmark developments. There are two professionally produced videos to enjoy and a fascinating timeline providing an overview of key moments which lets you delve more deeply into specific cameras. The only downside is that you can't click images to enlarge them, but Nikon says more content will be added over the coming months.

Our rating ★★★★★

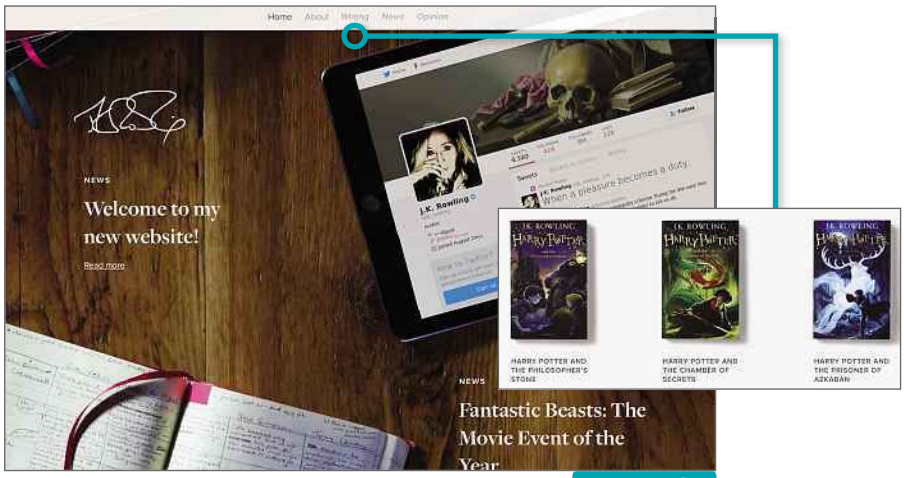


PROLOGUE
Discover how Nikon became involved in the fields of optics and photography



SPECIAL MOVIE
The stunning Lux Centuriae video is accompanied by a beautiful orchestral score





RELAUNCH

BOOKS

JK Rowling

www.jkrowling.com

Author JK Rowling has waved a magic wand over her personal website in the hope of turning it into an essential bookmark for fans of her work. She's certainly injected a bit of fun, not least with a mock-up of her wooden writing desk that displays visual links to areas of the site. Clicking an iPad, for instance, lets you read Rowling's latest tweets (which are often hilariously blunt), while selecting a crumpled piece of paper takes you to a page of debunked rumours. Mixed in are headlines pointing to news and opinion, and brief plot synopses of each of her books. The site isn't perfect – we'd like more personal insights into Rowling's writing – but it's a promising new chapter.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

FOOTBALL

Football London

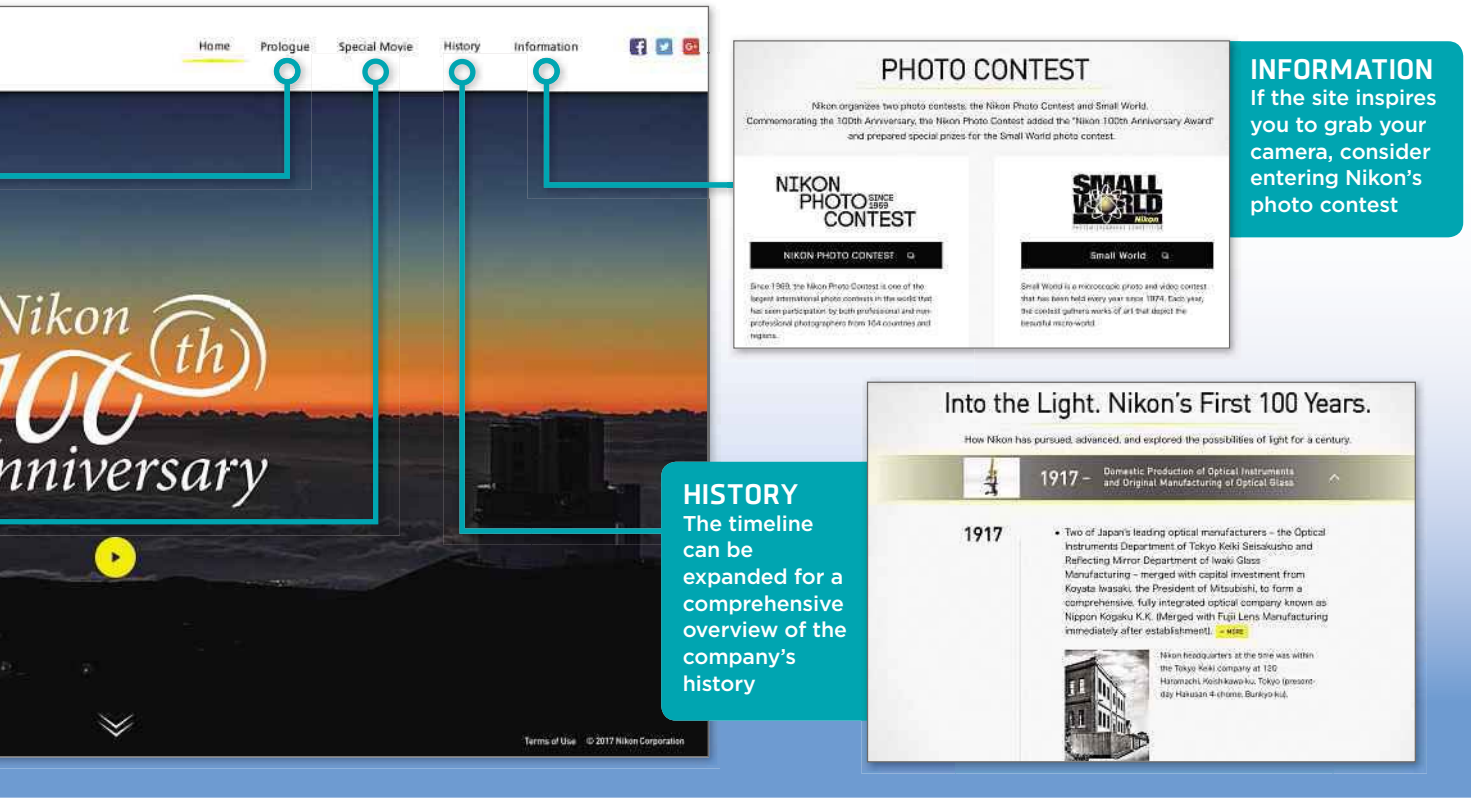
www.football.london

This online hub for football in London scores an immediate own-goal. By concentrating on Arsenal, Chelsea, Spurs, West Ham, Crystal Palace and Watford, it neglects scores of other clubs such as Fulham and QPR. Sporting politics aside, the site successfully keeps fans up-to-date with the latest news and transfers, with well-written articles and good-quality photos. Even so, it feels messy and incomplete. Selecting 'Fixtures and Results' fails to show scores and some teams have much more content written about them than others. A bit of extra time is needed to turn it around.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

Reviews by David Crookes

We review this fortnight's best new and relaunched websites and rate them for content, design and features





RELAUNCH

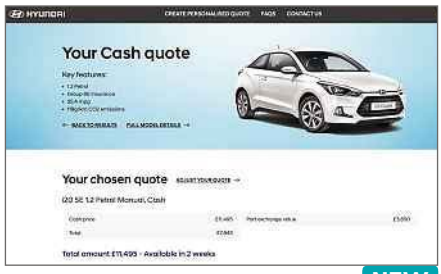
HEALTH

The Sleep Council

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

A good night's sleep is essential for your overall wellbeing but we all suffer occasional tossing and turning. To help you nod off, visit The Sleep Council's new website and click one of the cartoon characters on the homepage to find a possible solution to your problem. You can also listen to 'nodcasts' of soothing sounds such as birdsong or rain, take the stress test and print a sleep diary. The site is packed with goodies including practical advice and helpful videos, and we look forward to seeing its 30-day plan, which The Sleep Council promises is coming soon.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

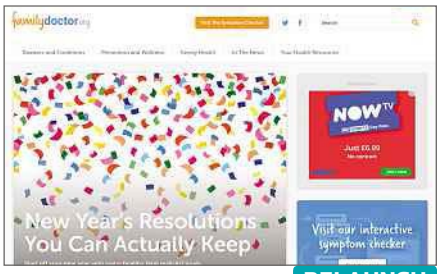
MOTORING

Hyundai Click to Buy

clicktobuy.hyundai.co.uk

If haggling with car salesmen drives you crazy, check out Hyundai's swish new site. This lets you carry out your vehicle purchase entirely online, dealing with the part-exchange of your current motor and recommending the best cars to suit your budget. We love the way it guides you through the process step-by-step, using sliders and tick boxes to value your car and customise the vehicle you want to buy. You'll still need to visit a dealer to pick up your new Hyundai, but the online discounts, concise information and clear availability times make for a much less stressful experience.

Our rating ★★★★☆



RELAUNCH

HEALTH

Family Doctor

familydoctor.org

Although this health-advice site is aimed at patients in the US, there's much to be gained from its massive selection of articles covering food, mental health, exercise, prevention and families. The frequently updated news section is packed with interesting info and the redesigned layout vastly improves site navigation while speeding up searches. But the best feature remains the fantastic symptom checker, which asks you to answer 'yes/no' questions to view possible causes for your ailment. Other useful resources include a thorough dictionary and a BMI calculator.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Tell us about your website via webuser@dennis.co.uk

WebUser

Q How can I root my old Android phone to install a different operating system?

A Page 58, Issue 375





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or search for 'webuser disc' on Amazon

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RELAUNCH

GAMES

Nintendo

www.nintendo.co.uk

With the Nintendo Switch console set to launch soon, the Japanese gaming giant has been playing around with its website. Gone is the grey colour scheme of old in favour of a smarter red-and-white design, and it's now easier to jump to the various sections by condensing the available menu options. Although these tweaks appear to be minor, they give the site a welcome lift and we particularly like the new social-media menu. This now brings up a window packed with various ways to connect with Nintendo and find out more about its latest games. And, of course, there's masses of Mario and other popular characters.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

TOURISM

Hello Hull

www.hellohull.com

Hull is the UK City of Culture for 2017 and if you fancy paying a visit, this unofficial website points you in the right direction. It lists hundreds of businesses across categories – including dining, attractions and shopping – and serves up plenty of info along with a map so you can find things to do in different areas of the city. In each case, you can leave ratings and reviews while the blog keeps you up to speed with the latest events. Some work is still needed, though: we're not sure that listing the Astoria Bingo Club and the Hollywood Bowl above key attractions such as The Deep and the Humber Bridge sends out the right message.

Our rating ★★★☆☆



NEW

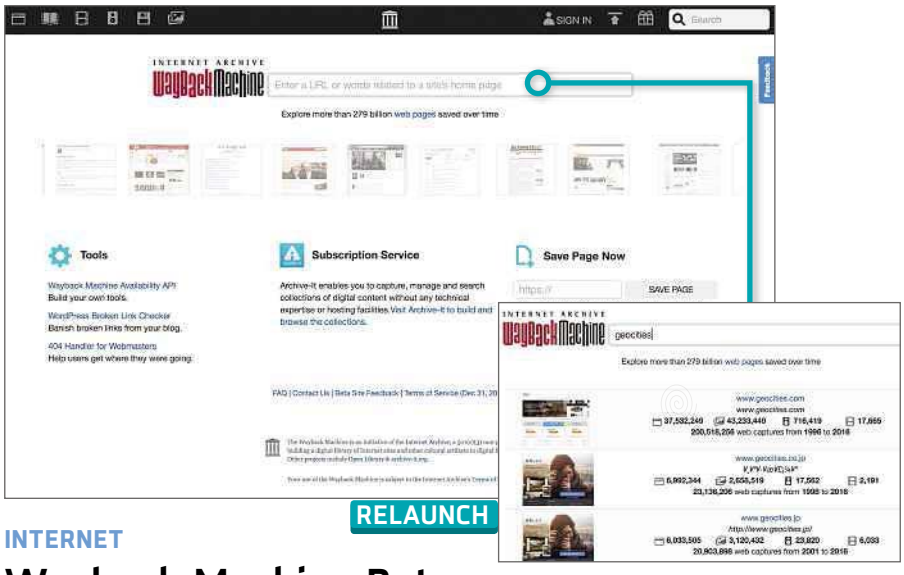
FOOTBALL

Stanley Chow FC

www.stanleychowfc.com

Talented football fanatic Stanley Chow loves the design of soccer kits and his website illustrates a host of them. By picking out the game's most iconic players, from Eric Cantona to Kevin Keegan, he has recreated the kits in a stylish and artistic fashion, allowing you to browse and view each of them in all their polyester glory. It's a simple yet professionally presented site, which captions each image with the footballer's first name, football club and year. There's also a shop that sells signed and embossed prints for £25 and an invitation to leave suggestions for future artwork on social media. Result!

Our rating ★★★★☆



RELAUNCH

INTERNET

Wayback Machine Beta

web-beta.archive.org

For the past 20 years, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine has been caching websites, allowing you to go back and see pages from bygone times. You used to have to enter a URL into Wayback's search box to do this, which meant knowing the exact web address, but the new Beta version lets you search using keywords, so it's much easier to find what you're after. The machine instantly displays potential matches as you type, along with a thumbnail image, the number of URLs attached to the name and the number of web captures available. The downside is that it only finds keywords on homepages, but it's much faster now and potentially very useful.

Our rating ★★★★★



RELAUNCH

FOOD & DRINK

Dairy Council

www.milk.co.uk

The Dairy Council is no longer reminding us that "milk has gotta lotta bottle", but its relaunched website clearly explains the health benefits of the white stuff and related products for different age groups, from babies to older adults. Rather than just presenting dull statistics about vitamin requirements and calcium levels (although, of course, there's a bit of that), it offers colourful posters, postcards and other materials for you to download to promote its milky message. Its modern design is complemented by well-chosen photos and informative content, which reveals some interesting facts among the sugar-bashing.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Simplify posting to multiple social-media services

If you have multiple accounts on social-media services, such as a Twitter account for yourself and another for your website, you'll know that being signed into both accounts at the same time can be a pain, involving multiple browsers and windows, or incognito workarounds. The Chrome add-on SessionBox (sessionbox.io) lets you keep different accounts open in separate tabs in the same browser. The free version also lets you colour-code and group different accounts to keep things organised. Download the add-on from the Chrome Web Store at bit.ly/sbadd415.

Relaxing EU cookie law

The European legislation which dictates that websites have to display cookie warnings is to be toned down. Currently, you have to warn users if you use any cookies, even innocuous ones that don't follow users off-site, such as visitor counters or shopping trolleys. A recent proposal from the European Commission, which you can read online at bit.ly/ec415, admits that the current law "has resulted in an overload of consent requests for internet users". It states that it will seek to streamline the law, so sites will only have to alert users about cookies if they're going to be used to track their browsing habits. The Commission hopes to get the revised legislation in place by June 2018.

Deal of the Fortnight

UK2 (www.uk2.net) is offering 50% off annual hosting and WordPress packages until the end of February. Prices start from £3.58 per month.

Web-building Helpdesk

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Mark Esho, Managing Director, Easy Internet (www.easy-internet.co.uk)

Q Is there a tool I can use to post to all my social-media accounts when I put up a new page?

Colin, via Web User Forums

A We recommend using Hootsuite (hootsuite.com), which lets you post to multiple social-media profiles simultaneously. With a free account, you can add up to three profiles, which is usually enough to cover your main channels, such as Twitter, Facebook and Google+. A paid-for account, which costs from £7.99 a month, lets you add more profiles. Hootsuite lets you create a single post to announce the new page on your website, and lets you add images, shorten the link and more. You can then select all the profiles you want to post it on. You can post it immediately or schedule it for a specific time and date.

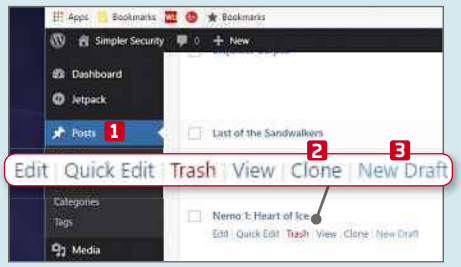
MINI WORKSHOP | Save time by basing new WordPress posts on old ones

Duplicate Post plug-in: bit.ly/duppost415 | 10 mins | WordPress website

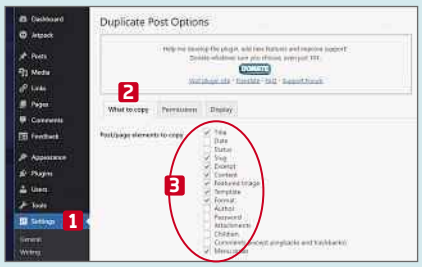
Creating new WordPress posts using Duplicate Post, which bases the new draft on a previous page, lets you save time by reusing elements such as categories, special layouts and more



1 Open your WordPress website and select Plugins. 1 Click Add New and type `duplicate post` into the search box. 2 Click its Install Now button 3 and, once it's installed, click Activate.



2 Create a new draft from an old post by clicking Posts. 1 Find the post you want to make a new post from, hover your mouse over the title and choose to Clone it 2 or create a New Draft. 3 You can also do this from the Edit Post page – there's a new 'Copy to a new draft' option above the 'Move to Trash' link.



3 To choose which parts of a post are duplicated when creating a clone or a new draft, go to Settings 1 and choose Duplicate Post. In the 'What to copy' tab, 2 you can choose from a list of elements that will transfer across when you create a new draft. 3 Tick the ones you want and untick any you don't.

+ Email us your website building questions at webuser@dennis.co.uk


tp-link
OUT OF THIS WORLD
• PERFORMANCE •
"GAME LIKE YOU'VE NEVER GAMED BEFORE"
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Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Netgear Orbi

David Ludlow takes a look at Netgear's latest attempt to bring fast, reliable Wi-Fi to our homes



Weak Wi-Fi is a common curse and many of us suffer dead spots, unreliable connections and slow speeds in our homes. You can try to solve the problem by running Ethernet cables around your house or installing Wi-Fi range extenders, but these can be complicated to configure and may only fix half the problem by delivering improved range at the expense of speed.

Netgear's Orbi system offers a different solution by using two routers linked by a dedicated wireless network (called the 'backbone') to ensure a solid, superfast connection. You plug one router into your broadband (via an Ethernet port, so you'll need an existing Ethernet modem or router to connect it to) and place the second 'satellite' router in the middle of your home to extend the network's coverage.

The backbone is a dedicated 1,733Mbps (megabits per second), 802.11ac 5GHz network that's used exclusively to transfer data between the two Orbi routers. Each router then provides an additional 866Mbps 802.11ac 5GHz network and a 400Mbps 2.4GHz network, and your Wi-Fi devices connect to whichever router is nearest. If that's the satellite, the high-speed backbone should ensure you don't experience any slowdown in Wi-Fi speed. The bandwidth available to the backbone also means that there's room for expansion, so you can buy additional satellite units to expand your network further.

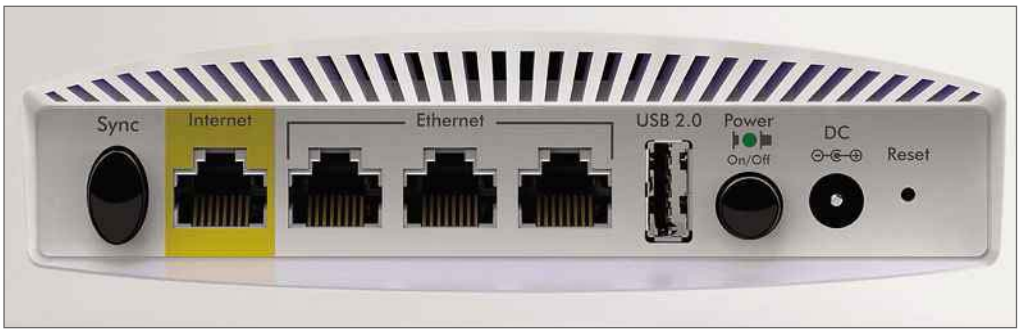
Simple setup

Setting up the starter pack couldn't be easier. The main router and the satellite come already paired, so all you have to do is connect the main one to your internet connection, then position your satellite and power it on.

Usefully, the satellite unit displays a coloured LED that glows for 10 seconds to show your network strength: blue indicates that the connection is good, amber means fair, and pulsing magenta means there's no connection.

> "Netgear's Orbi system uses two routers linked by a dedicated wireless network to ensure a solid, superfast connection"

The web-based wizard then takes you through configuring a new admin password and providing your Orbi system with a new wireless network name and password. Settings are automatically synchronised between the router unit and satellite to create a single network in



your home. This is an improvement on the way many Wi-Fi extenders work, which create a separate network in addition to the one operated by your router.

Once you're set up, the Orbi's settings can be managed through a standard web interface. If you've ever owned a Netgear router, the Orbi's tools will be familiar, although you don't get as many settings to tweak. For example, you can't split the 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks. Instead, the Orbi uses 'band steering', which detects the capabilities of the connecting device, checks the current load and network strength, and automatically connects it to what it considers to be the best network. So you can't control whether your devices use the 5GHz or 2.4GHz networks, but the overall result should provide better stability and faster speed.

Performance

We placed the main Orbi router where our internet connection enters the house and put the satellite on the first floor. At a range of five metres, we saw a throughput of 384Mbps; on the first floor, we got a throughput of 318Mbps; and on the second floor, 191Mbps. While close-range speeds are excellent, rivals such as the high-end Netgear Nighthawk X8 perform better at a distance.

Unplugging the satellite didn't make much difference to these results because the main router's location already provided good coverage in our test house. We then moved the satellite to the kitchen, to see if it could improve reception at the far end of the property and into the garden, and the results in this case were more marked.

Without the satellite, we saw throughput of 30Mbps just outside the kitchen window, and no connection at all at the bottom of the garden. With the satellite in its new position, we got 288Mbps just outside the window and 253Mbps at the bottom of the garden. These speeds could be improved by fine-tuning the satellite's positioning and we got the best results by placing it in the middle of the kitchen.

Features

The Orbi devices have all the features you'd expect in a modern router, including port forwarding, dynamic DNS settings and Netgear's excellent web-filtering. However, it failed to stream internet-based YouView channels such as BT Sport, although Netgear has plans to release an update soon that will manage this.

The router also offers three Gigabit Ethernet ports for wired devices, and the satellite adds another four. This could make the satellite a useful addition to an office or at the back of a TV, where you may have a collection of wired devices.

All that said, the Orbi is very expensive and perhaps some of this is down to the aesthetically pleasing appearance of its units. Most high-end routers are designed to appeal to tech-heads who want a device that looks like it could send a Wi-Fi signal to Mars. That's fine when the router is tucked away in an office or behind a load of other electronics, but displaying it in the middle of your house may elicit a less enthusiastic response from family members who don't want their living space dominated by something so utilitarian. The curved, aerial-free casing of the Orbi is far easier on the eye, and more reminiscent of a vase or the base of a lamp. It still needs a power cable, so pride of place on the coffee table isn't an option, but it looks a lot better among your household furnishings than the usual spiky monstrosity.

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

FEATURES	★★★★☆
PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★☆☆

Overall, the Orbi is a smart system. We found it delivered rock-solid Wi-Fi to our entire house so if you've struggled with poor Wi-Fi performance in the past, then this router could well be the answer.

But it's far from cheap. If you can physically relocate your existing router closer to the middle of the home, you may be able to improve your Wi-Fi performance without forking out £370. However, the Orbi's plain, unassuming design is better suited to blending in with your decor.

See our cover feature on page 38 for more advice about speeding up your Wi-Fi.

PRODUCT INFO

Netgear Orbi

Price: £370.66
Buy from: Amazon
bit.ly/orbi415

SPECIFICATIONS

- Tri-band Wi-Fi
- Dedicated 5GHz quad-stream backbone
- 2.4GHZ and 5GHz bands available to connected devices
- Wi-Fi coverage up to 370m²
- 4 x Gigabit Ethernet ports on each device
- IPv6 compatible
- Dynamic DNS
- Port forwarding
- Parental controls
- Access point mode
- Automatic updates
- WPS setup
- 64/128-bit WEP, WPA/WPA-2 PSK, WPA/WPA-2 Enterprise security

FOR

✓ Improve Wi-Fi speeds
✓ Eliminate Wi-Fi deadspots
✓ Design camouflages it as an ornament

AGAINST

✗ Moving any router to the middle of your home can help with faster speed and fewer deadspots
✗ Expensive

EVEN FASTER

Netgear Nighthawk X8, £299.99
Buy from Amazon:
bit.ly/nhawk415



MORE AFFORDABLE

TP-Link RE450, £49.99
Buy from Amazon:
bit.ly/tpl415



Honor 6X

Ian Betteridge tests Honor's latest Android phone, which offers iPhone 7-style twin cameras at a very reasonable price



Honor's previous phones were praised for providing top-end features at affordable prices. The Honor 6X, which the company announced at CES and is already available in the UK, sticks to the winning formula: it's not just a good phone for the money – it's a good phone, full stop.

The design of the 6X isn't going to set the world on fire, but the curved design of its matt-metal body feels comfortable to hold, avoids fingerprint smudges and doesn't look or feel cheap. It comes in a choice of three colours – silver, grey or gold – and houses a 1080p 5.5in LCD screen, along with 32GB of storage and 3GB of RAM.

PRODUCT INFO

Honor 6X

Price: £225

Buy from Amazon:
bit.ly/honor415

SPECIFICATIONS

- Kirin 655 octa-core processor
- 32GB storage
- 3GB RAM memory
- 5.5in 1080p screen
- Dual-lens 12MP + 2MP rear camera
- Manufacturer-quoted battery life of 2.15 days (1.5 days with heavy use)

FOR

✓ Affordable
✓ High-end features

AGAINST

✗ Not as powerful as big-name flagship phones

The phone has a dual SIM slot and uses micro-USB for charging. There's also a fingerprint reader, which – typically for an Honor smartphone – is positioned on the back, just below the twin-lens camera. This makes it almost impossible not to plonk your finger on the lens when feeling around for it. On the plus side, it's very fast – in fact, unlocking the Honor 6X is so quick it's virtually instantaneous.

Camera, interface and battery

The Honor 6X's camera is particularly impressive. It's the only phone in this price range to include dual-lenses, in this case a 12-megapixel lens and a 2-megapixel secondary sensor, allowing it to simulate DSLR-like wide-aperture shots. This means you can focus on one element in the picture while blurring everything else. It's not as effective at performing this trick as the iPhone 7 Plus, but it's still good enough to give your portraits a lift. You can even change the focus point after you've taken the shot and save different versions. We tested the camera by taking some challenging indoor shots and the image quality was good, although not spectacular.

Honor has tinkered with the Android interface and includes some unwanted extra software, but you can uninstall everything if you want. Disappointingly, at launch, the Honor 6X doesn't come with Android 7 Nougat, but that's promised in the next couple of months.

> "it's not just a good phone for the money – it's a good phone, full stop"

Thanks to a large 3,340mAh battery, low-voltage LCD backlight and Kirin 655 octa-core processor, Honor claims the 6X has twice the battery life of the Honor 5X, which is a significant improvement.

Value for money

There's a lot of competition among phones in this price range, but the Honor 6X's design and camera give the device an edge over its rivals. It's also fast enough for demanding users and the battery life is good. Its biggest competitor is the Motorola Moto G4 (reviewed in Issue 404, bit.ly/webuser404), which is cheaper and has a better screen. Nevertheless, we prefer the design and the dual-lens camera of the 6X.

OUR VERDICT ★★★★☆

FEATURES	★★★★★
PERFORMANCE	★★★★☆
EASE OF USE	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★

The Honor 6X holds its own against phones that cost much more. It doesn't have all the power and performance that you expect from the latest top-of-the-range Apple and Samsung phones, but with the addition of some attractive high-end extras, such as its dual-lens camera and fingerprint reader, this is a brilliant phone for the price.

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HARDWARE

WI-FI REPEATER



TP-Link RE450

£44.99 from bit.ly/tpl414
Date tested: December 2016

The TP-Link RE450 provides a strong signal at a price that's hard to resist. It's better at extending the 5GHz network than the 2.4GHz, but it also acts as a bridge to transfer older devices to the newer network.

KEY SPECS

2 x 60mm, 1 x 42mm antennae ■ 3.8W power consumption ■ 2.4GHz (450Mbps) and 5GHz (1,300Mbps) ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ WPS button ■ Repeater and access point modes ■ 163 x 76 x 37mm ■ Three-year return-to-base warranty

MONITOR



AOC Q2781PQ

£299.99 from bit.ly/aoc412
Date tested: December 2016

This good-value monitor offers impressive image quality, a lovely design and 178-degree horizontal and vertical viewing angles. You won't need to calibrate it, either. If you're after a monitor with a resolution of 2,560 x 1,440 pixels, buy this.

KEY SPECS

27in flat screen ■ 2,560 x 1,440 pixels resolution ■ 1,000:1 contrast ratio ■ 350cd/m^2 brightness ■ 60Hz refresh rate ■ DisplayPort, HDMI, VGA inputs ■ 330 x 180mm base ■ Three-year collect-and-return warranty

BUDGET TABLET



Amazon Fire HD 8

£89.99 from bit.ly/8hd410
Date tested: November 2016

For its low price, Amazon's Fire HD 8 is a pleasant surprise: it's great for media streaming and web browsing, its battery life is exceptional and it's easy to use. Once it's integrated with Amazon's Alexa voice assistant, it will be even better.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 1.3GHz processor ■ 8in 1,280 x 800 pixels resolution screen ■ 2-megapixels rear camera ■ 16GB storage (12.09GB free) ■ MicroSD memory card slot ■ Fire OS operating system ■ 214 x 128 x 9.2mm ■ 341g

CHROMEBOOK



Acer Chromebook R11

£229.99 from www.amazon.co.uk
Date tested: October 2016

The Acer Chromebook R11 laptop has a keyboard that flips behind its touchscreen, so it can also be used as a tablet. It's not hugely powerful but it runs all the web apps you might need and its battery lasted over eight hours in our tests.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 11.6in touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ 16GB eMMC drive ■ 1 x USB 2, 1 x USB 3 ports ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ SD card reader ■ 295 x 203 x 20mm ■ 1.2kg

WINDOWS 10 LAPTOP



Acer Aspire One Cloudbook 14

£199.98 from www.pcworld.co.uk
Date tested: September 2016

The Cloudbook 14 is as good a laptop as you'll get for less than £200. It's not particularly fast and doesn't have a brilliant display, but it's fantastic value, especially because it includes a year's subscription to Office 365 Personal.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 32GB SSD ■ 14.1in non-touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ 1 x USB 3, 1 x USB 2 port ■ 802.11n Wi-Fi ■ 339 x 235 x 17.9mm ■ 1.6kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

E-READER



Amazon Kindle (2016)

£69.99 from www.amazon.co.uk
Date tested: August 2016

The highly capable Kindle is lightweight, great for reading and matches its rivals for usability and content. Despite the lack of a front light, it remains the best e-reader you can buy for less than £100.

KEY SPECS

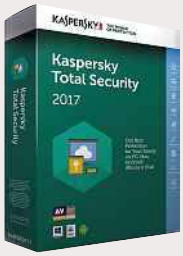
6in E Ink Pearl screen ■ 800 x 600 pixels resolution, 167 ppi ■ Optical touchscreen ■ 4GB storage ■ 160 x 115 x 9.1mm ■ 161g ■ No front light ■ £10 less with Amazon Special Offers ■ Up to four weeks' battery life (if used 30 minutes per day)

All prices correct at time of review

SOFTWARE & SERVICES

INTERNET SECURITY

Kaspersky Internet Security 2017



£19.95 from bit.ly/kaspersky2017
Date tested: August 2016

Kaspersky is rock solid at protecting your PC from the worst of the web, and has come top in eight of our most recent tests, blocking all malware with its robust defences. Use the URL above to save £15.04 on the software (normal price £34.99).

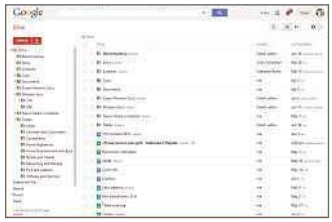
KEY FEATURES

Antivirus and firewall tools ■ Protects online shopping and banking ■ Identity and privacy tools ■ Dangerous-website alerts ■ New software updater ■ Secure-connection VPN ■ Advanced ad-blocking system ■ Multi-device version ■ Compatible with Windows 10

ONLINE STORAGE

Google Drive

From free from drive.google.com
Date tested: January 2016



Google Drive is easy to use and has lots of free storage. The Windows software integrates with Explorer, so saving and syncing files is like keeping them in any other PC folder.

KEY FEATURES

16GB free storage ■ Web-based office software ■ Works with XP, Vista, 7, 8+ and 10 ■ Chrome browser add-on ■ Android and iOS apps ■ 100GB extra storage for £1.36 per month; 1TB for £6.01 per month; 10TB for £60.16 per month

WEB DESIGN

Xara Web Designer 11 Premium



£69.99 from www.xara.com
Date tested: November 2015

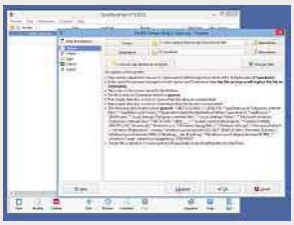
Xara Web Designer 11 is a great tool for anyone who wants a good-looking website without having to use HTML or CSS code. The interface is easy to use and the software includes all the tools you need to create flexible sites that change depending on the size of the screen.

KEY FEATURES

90+ templates ■ WYSIWYG design ■ Create responsive websites ■ Embed codes ■ Add HTML ■ Online editing ■ FTP uploader ■ Hosting (requires registration) ■ Browser preview (Chrome, Firefox, IE, Opera)

BACKUP AND SYNC

SyncBackFree



Free from bit.ly/syncback366
Date tested: March 2015

SyncBackFree is very capable software that gives you plenty of control over how it can be used. If you know what you need from your backups and you're prepared to spend some time configuring the options, SyncBackFree has everything you need.

KEY FEATURES

Synchronise: Copy files in both directions ■ Restore backup files easily ■ Email logs ■ Schedule backups ■ Simple and Advanced mode ■ Runs on Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 and 10 ■ Extensive Help documentation and support

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Elements



£81.08 from www.adobe.com/uk
Date tested: December 2014

With its tidy interface and pop-out trays, Adobe Photoshop Elements provides everything an amateur photographer needs and helps you quickly find the right editing tools.

KEY FEATURES

Compatible with Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8+ and 10 (32- and 64-bit) ■ Bundled photo organiser ■ Content-aware edits ■ Guided edits ■ People-beautifier tools ■ RAW support

VIDEO EDITING

Adobe Premiere Elements

£81.08 from www.adobe.com/uk
Date tested: December 2014



Premiere Elements' superb interface makes its many features neat but accessible. You won't find better video-editing software for the price.

KEY FEATURES

Automatic editing ■ Export to multiple video formats ■ Burn to DVD and Blu-ray ■ Image stabiliser ■ Stop-motion capture ■ Motion tracking ■ Musical scores and sound effects ■ Upload to YouTube and Vimeo

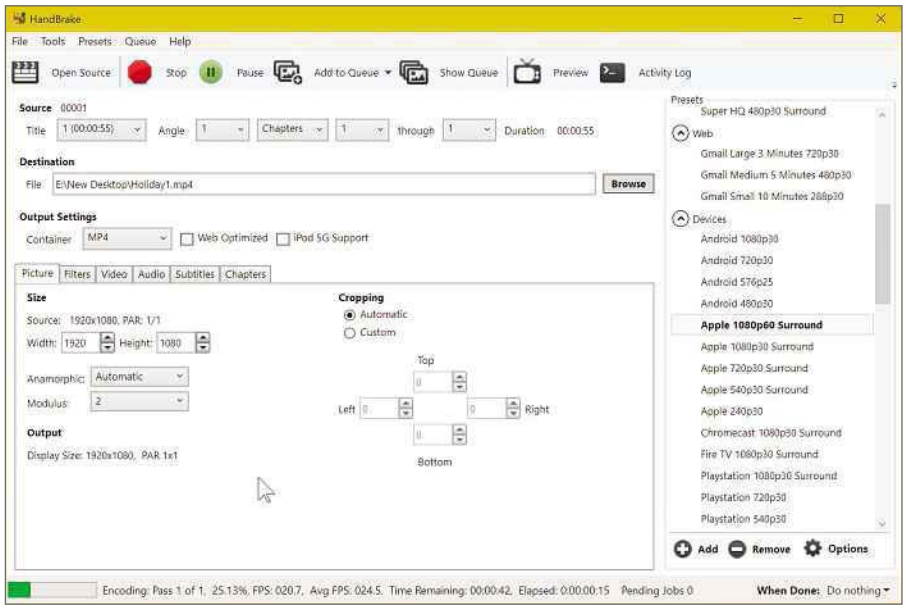
Best Free Software

VIDEO CONVERTER

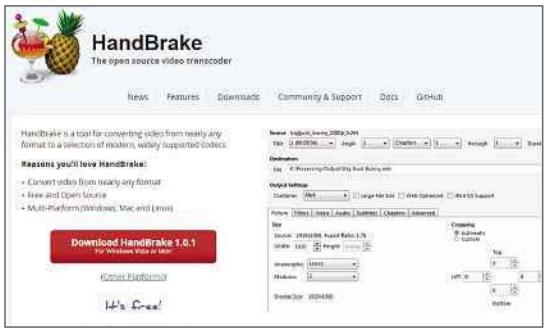
HandBrake

handbrake.fr

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS or Linux
File size: 10.1MB



HandBrake is a tool for converting video from nearly any format to a selection of modern, widely supported codecs.



The excellent free program HandBrake lets you convert a video file from one format to another. It's easy to use and includes plenty of advanced options. In most cases, you just select the file to convert, choose the format you require and leave the software to get on with it. The program also lets you rip DVDs and encode the video to various formats.

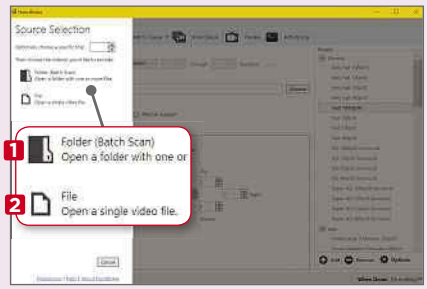
Development of this popular software began 13 years ago and it has finally shed its beta tag. HandBrake version 1.0 introduces lots of tweaks and changes, as well as new video presets covering the latest phones, tablets and other devices.

If you want to rip your movie collection – for legal backup purposes only, obviously – the software includes new Matroska (MKV) presets. You can now rip specific DVD titles and chapters, and improvements have been made to subtitle support and rendering, too. As you might expect, there have also been plenty of bug fixes and performance tweaks made throughout.

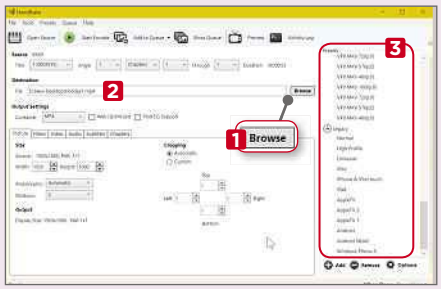
Although HandBrake is easy to use, there's help available if you need it in the online product documentation, which has been rewritten to make the program less technical and easier to understand.

When you need to convert a video from one format to another, HandBrake is the perfect solution.

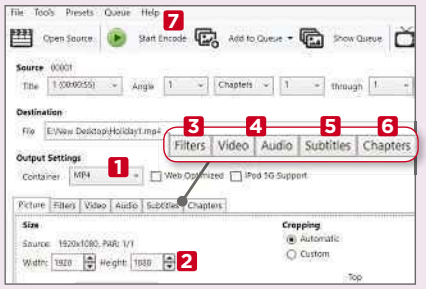
MINI WORKSHOP | Convert any video using HandBrake



1 Start by choosing the video(s) you want to convert. You can open a folder containing one or more files **1** or open a single video. **2** Navigate to the location where your media is stored and select the item(s) you want. The software will scan the chosen content ready for converting.

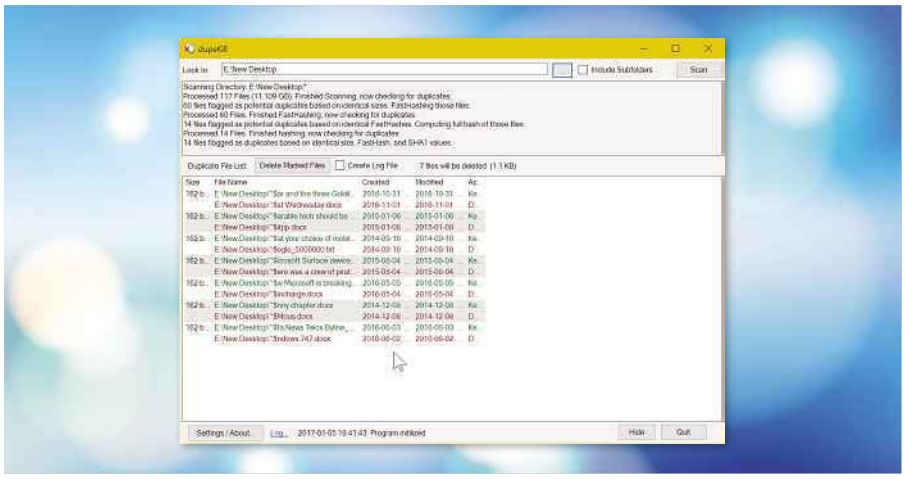


2 Click the Browse button **1** to select a save destination **2** and enter a file name. There's a long list of presets on the right. **3** These include general video formats, ones for sharing over the web and a list of specific device formats for viewing on Android, Apple, Chromecast, Fire TV, PlayStation, Roku, Xbox and older legacy devices.



3 You can change the output settings (switch from MP4 to MKV), **1** and optimise the video for the web. You can also change the dimensions, **2** apply filters **3** (such as de-interlace, de-noise and de-block), adjust the settings for video and audio, **4** add subtitles **5** and create chapters. **6** Click Start Encode **7** to begin the conversion process.

This fortnight's top new software downloads to help you make the most of your PC, and they're all FREE



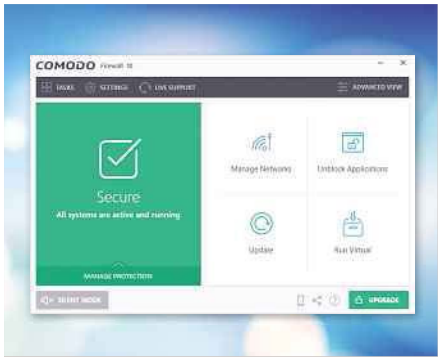
DUPLICATE FINDER

DupeKill

www.bit.ly/dupe415

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10 **File size:** 63.3KB

The author of this program admits it's just another duplicate-file remover, but DupeKill has an interesting trick up its sleeve – it intelligently guesses which files you want to keep based on their name. It also uses a couple of tricks to speed up searches, such as comparing hashes (small samples taken from files) first. This can be a real timesaver when comparing larger files. It only identifies exact duplicates, not files that are merely similar.



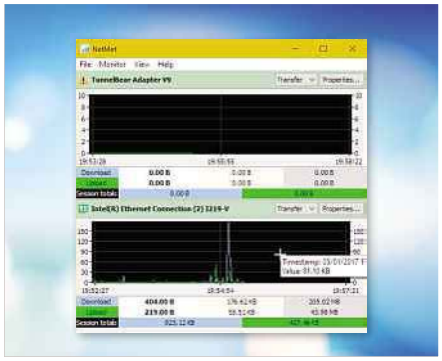
FIREWALL

Comodo Firewall 10

www.comodo.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 5.2MB

Firewalls control internet traffic to and from your PC, helping to keep you safe online. Windows comes with its own firewall, but Comodo's product is much more powerful. It blocks incoming and outgoing traffic, and its Defense+ technology locks down your system further. The latest release has a new look and updated features. Be sure to decline the bundled junk and unwanted changes during installation.



NETWORK MONITOR

Network Meter 2

www.mitec.cz

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 or Mac OS **File size:** 841KB

This portable tool monitors traffic across your network. Launch it, click Monitor and select the network adapter(s) you want to focus on.
A real-time graph shows you the volume of data as it's uploaded or downloaded, or the current network speeds. You can switch between graph types and monitor more than one network adapter at a time. There are also various other options you can play around with.

New Windows Apps

Simple Desktops

bit.ly/sd415

Min requirements: Windows 10
File size: 21MB

Simple Desktops is a collection of simple, high-quality images you can download and use as Windows wallpaper. They are designed to be aesthetically interesting, but free of distractions.



Feem v4

bit.ly/feem415

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10
File size: 15MB

This app lets you easily share files quickly across a network, without an active internet connection.
It works with all popular devices including iPhone, Android, Windows, Mac and Linux. Transfers are encrypted.

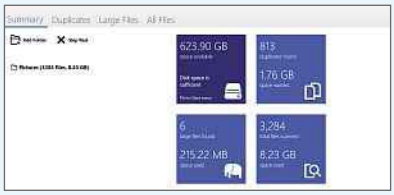


Disko Ultimate

bit.ly/disko415

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10
File size: 17.1MB

This excellent app makes it easy to reclaim wasted drive space by finding and deleting duplicate and large files. It's free at the time of writing, but it's possible the author will start charging for it soon.

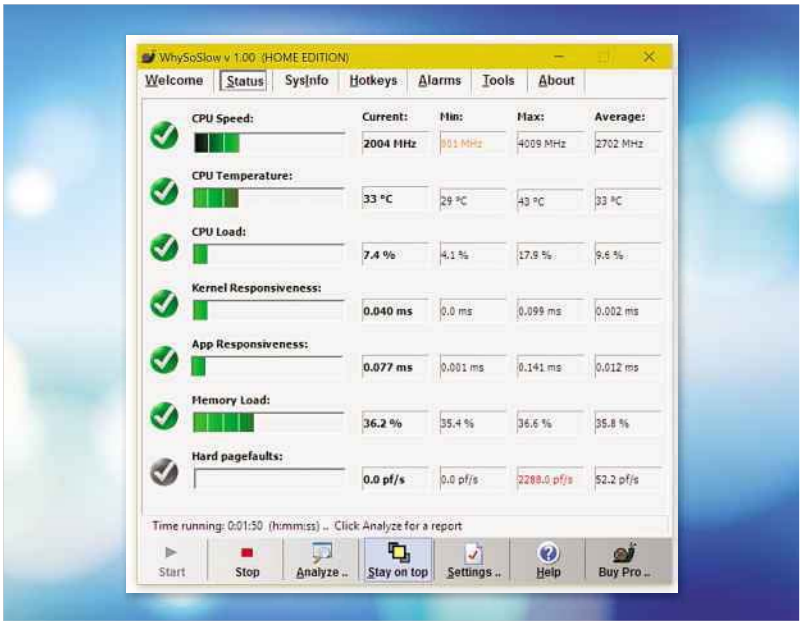


SYSTEM TOOL

WhySoSlow

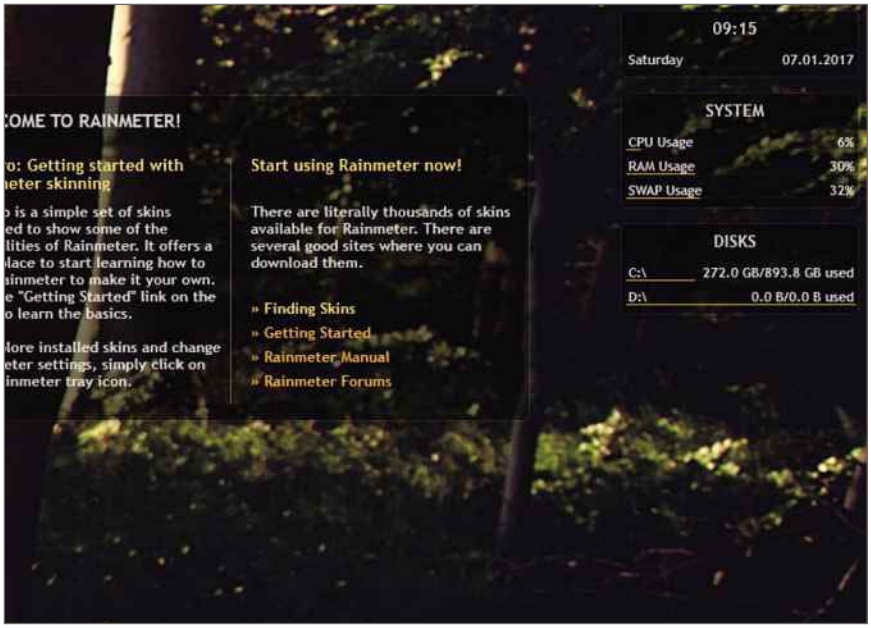
www.resplendence.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 2.4MB



If your PC is running slowly, WhySoSlow will help you identify and overcome the possible causes. Now out of beta, the software analyses potential performance bottlenecks including processor speed and temperature, resource-hungry processes, excessive memory and page-file usage, drive fragmentation and more. A status screen shows how the different elements are performing, but if that doesn't reveal anything obvious, you can ask the software to analyse your system and generate a thorough report.

WhySoSlow also warns you if the processor temperature gets too high, and its AntiFreeze functionality might just save the day if your system becomes unresponsive.



WINDOWS CUSTOMISATION TOOL

Rainmeter 4

www.rainmeter.net

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10
File size: 2.1MB

It's easy to make basic tweaks to your Desktop's appearance – you can change the wallpaper, play around with the colours and even relocate the taskbar to a different edge of your screen. But if you want to make more advanced changes, you'll need a dedicated customisation tool such as Rainmeter, which lets you add sidebars, system monitors, news feeds and more.

The latest version of the software requires Windows 7 or newer. Notable additions and changes include a new shape meter that lets you create vector shapes, a new dialogue box for selecting skins, an inline shadow creator and a ton of fixes.

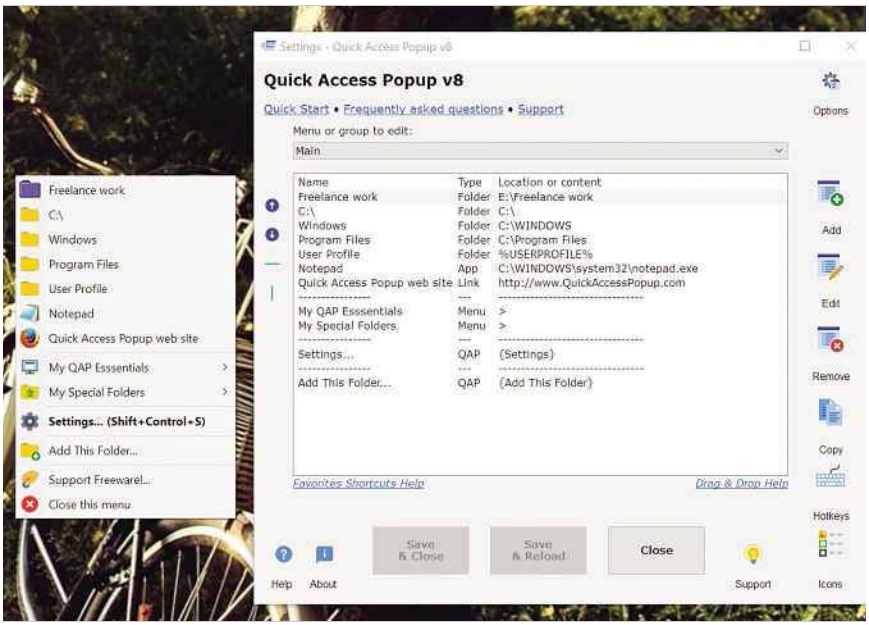
SYSTEM TOOL

Quick Access Popup 8

www.quickaccesspopup.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 or Mac OS **File size:** 1.7MB

Quick Access Popup aims to save you time by reducing the number of mouse clicks required to launch applications, open documents and folders, and access websites. Summon the menu by clicking the middle mouse button (scroll wheel) and quickly add sites to folders from here. Favourites can be launched by using simple keyboard shortcuts. QAP also lets you quickly switch to any currently open window. The latest version adds some live folder options, introduces new menu icons, and makes various improvements to the program and settings. It's highly customisable with lots of useful features.





GAME

Room 007

bit.ly/room415

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 11.2MB

Like an explosive version of a marble run, Room 007 is a fun physics-based puzzle game in which the idea is to get rid of the bomb before it detonates. To do this, you need to manipulate the various items of furniture – flipping the bed, opening the cupboard, lifting the chair and so on. Timing is important and you have to act quickly.

✗ Don't install...

BitLocker

Min requirements: Windows Vista/7 Ultimate or Enterprise; Windows 8+/10 Pro or Enterprise

File size: N/A

BitLocker is a powerful encryption tool that offers a convenient way of protecting your data. Built into special versions of Windows, it's mainly designed to encrypt your whole hard drive, but it can also be used for external drives and virtual volumes. However, there has been speculation that BitLocker has 'backdoors' to enable government agencies to decrypt your data.



...Install this instead ✓

VeraCrypt

veracrypt.codeplex.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS or Linux

File size: 23.6MB

VeraCrypt's powerful, industry-standard encryption makes it the best free tool for encrypting large numbers of files. Based on the enormously popular TrueCrypt (which was abandoned by its developers), VeraCrypt lets you create password-protected containers (called 'volumes') that, once 'mounted', appear like any other drive in Windows Explorer. You can choose from 10 industry-standard encryption algorithms and there's a handy tutorial to help you create your first container. It can also be run as a portable program.



UPDATED | New tweaks and fixes for your favourite free programs



SYSTEM TOOL

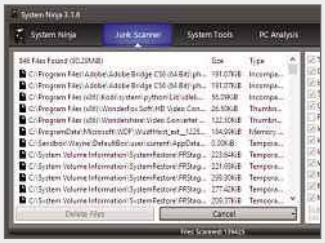
Windows Repair 3.9.21

www.tweaking.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+

File size: 31.1MB

Perennial *Web User* favourite Windows Repair can fix all manner of annoying PC problems. The new version completely changes the way the Registry and file-permission-repair features work, making them faster and more efficient.



SYSTEM CLEANER

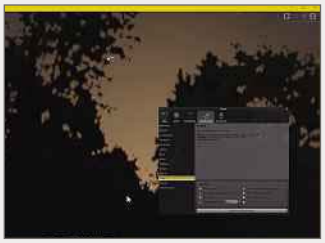
System Ninja 3.1.6

singularlabs.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 2.3MB

System Ninja removes junk from your PC, including temporary files, internet cookies and history, thumbnail caches and more. This update to the powerful system cleaner adds a duplicate-file finder and improves cleaning for a variety of programs. It fixes several major bugs, too.



ASTRONOMY SOFTWARE

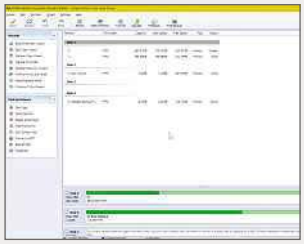
Stellarium 0.15.1

stellarium.org

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS or Linux

File size: 167MB

Stellarium is an open-source Desktop planetarium that lets you explore the heavens from a set viewpoint on Earth (or beyond). This new build can display the Digital Sky Survey (DSS) atlases, and makes the AstroCalc feature available from the main menu.



PARTITION MANAGER

Aomei Partition Assistant Standard 6.1

www.aomeitech.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 9.5MB

Aomei's Partition Assistant lets you create, copy, merge, resize and split partitions, and recover damaged ones. The latest version adds the ability to create second Ext2/Ext3 partitions on SD memory cards and USB flash drives without formatting. ■

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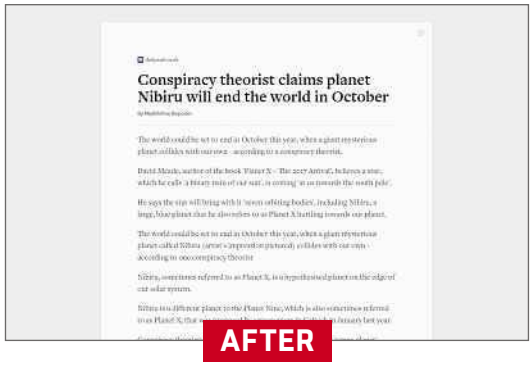
Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Remove all the clutter from web pages



BEFORE



AFTER

Firefox has a useful Reader View that strips adverts, background images and other unwanted clutter from web pages, but in Chrome you're stuck with the full horror of dodgy design. Unless, that is, you install the marvellous Mercury Reader (bit.ly/mercury415), which makes even the messiest articles easy to read and speedy to print. Just click the rocket icon on your toolbar to instantly and thoroughly clean up the current page, leaving nothing but the main text and image content.

Alternatively, you can just press Alt and ' on your keyboard to switch to the streamlined view (and back again). Mercury Reader lets you set the default text size, typography (serif or sans) and theme (light or dark) of optimised pages, and share the clutter-free result on social media.

See what Facebook tags in your photos

Facebook's facial-recognition feature is banned in Europe due to privacy concerns, although you can of course still 'tag' people in photos yourself. What's less well known is that the social network also identifies objects in images, partly so it can gauge your interests for advertising purposes and also – more commendably – for the benefit of visually impaired users who rely on screen readers. A clever new Chrome extension called Show Facebook Computer Vision Tags (bit.ly/tags415) lifts the lid on this covert identification by telling you exactly what Facebook has spotted in photos on your timeline. Common tags include 'food', 'people smiling', 'water', 'plant' and 'table', and the add-on also tells you if a picture was taken indoors, outdoors or at night. It works both with images you've uploaded and with those shared by other people, and is an interesting way to see the kind of information that is routinely extracted from your photos. A version is also available for Firefox (bit.ly/tagsfire415).



Close idle Chrome tabs automatically

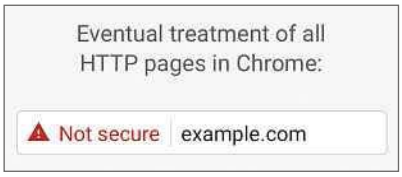
Leaving browser tabs open when you've finished with them not only wastes memory but also compromises your privacy and – if you've been shopping online – could even cost you money. Naturally, you can close idle tabs manually, but if you're the forgetful type it's worth installing Tab Auto Close (bit.ly/tab415). This new add-on automatically closes your browser tabs after they've been inactive for an hour – you can increase or decrease the number of minutes as required.



Tabs you want to keep open indefinitely can be added to a 'blacklist' to prevent them from being closed, and a two-minute warning gives you time to pause and resume tab termination.

Get warnings for unsecure websites

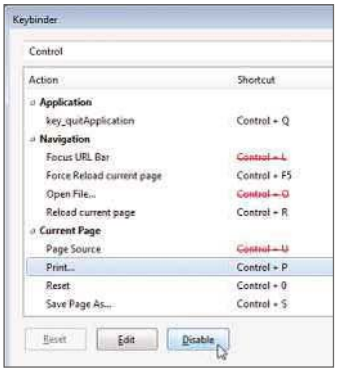
Any respectable website that asks you to enter a password or payment details will use a secure HTTPS connection to encrypt your data but, sadly, there are still plenty of sites out there that don't. For this reason – as of Chrome 56 – you'll now see a warning when a page you're visiting contains sensitive page elements such as input fields for passwords or credit-card details, but uses an unsafe HTTP server. This warning consists of a red triangle and the words 'Not secure' and will appear even when you're browsing in incognito mode. You can ignore it and proceed anyway, but you do so at your own peril!



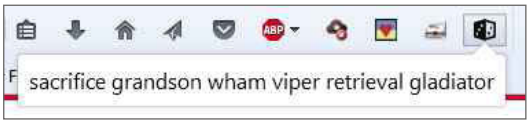
This fortnight's most useful tips and add-ons to help you get the most from Chrome, Firefox, Opera and more

FIREFOX

Customise and disable keyboard shortcuts



Keyboard shortcuts are undoubtedly useful, saving you a lot of time and mouse clicking, but they can also prove annoying if you trigger them accidentally or have to stretch your aching fingers to perform them. You can solve both these problems using Keybinder (bit.ly/keybinder415), which lets you disable keyboard shortcuts you don't need and change the ones you don't like. Open the add-on either by clicking the toolbar button or by selecting Tools, Keybinder and you'll see a list of all available Firefox shortcuts, from Ctrl+Q (which closes the browser) to Ctrl+Shift+K (which opens the Web Console for developers). From here you can either disable unwanted shortcuts or edit them to use your preferred key combinations instead. Any changes you make can be easily undone by clicking Enable or Reset.



Generate a secure passphrase

Word-based passwords are notoriously unsafe because they're so easy to guess, but mixtures of letters and numbers are difficult to remember. A better alternative is to create a passphrase from several words, which is where Passphrase Generator (bit.ly/pass415) comes in. This add-on combines a large word list from the digital-rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF, www.eff.org/dice) with Firefox's own cryptography to create a random string of six words that you can use to register with websites. This passphrase is generated entirely in your browser – no information is sent to or received from other sources – and refreshes when you click the add-on's toolbar button. We got some interesting combos including 'sacrifice grandson wham viper retrieval gladiator', but do keep yours secret!

Right-click and copy on any website

Some websites – especially news sources – are very protective of their content and stop you selecting, right-clicking and copying their text and images. This block is usually implemented using JavaScript, but you can get around it using Enable Right Click and Copy (bit.ly/copy415). Once installed, the tool sidesteps any right-click restrictions so you can grab content without having to disable JavaScript. It worked on every site we tested. For Chrome, try the similar RightToCopy (bit.ly/right415).

Test your online reading speed

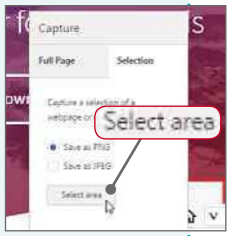
Are you a speed reader or a slowcoach when perusing articles on the web? Find out by installing Reading Speed Test (bit.ly/test415), which calculates your words-per-minute reading speed. Simply select a block of text, right-click and choose 'Reading speed test' to start the 'stopwatch'. Click Done when you've finished reading (you can restart if necessary) and the add-on will tell you the number of words you read, the time it took and your words-per-minute speed. It's surprisingly addictive and helps you determine how long it will take to read lengthy items.



OTHER BROWSERS

Capture screenshots instantly in Vivaldi

To capture screen grabs in Chrome or Firefox, you need to install an add-on, but the ever-innovative Vivaldi trumps both those browsers by offering a built-in screen-capture tool. Just click the new camera button on the status bar, decide whether to capture the full web page – including non-visible parts – or just a selection, then click 'Start capture'. You can save the resulting grab as a PNG or JPEG image, and the picture can include the browser itself. The new feature is available in version 1.7 of Vivaldi (www.vivaldi.com).



Open Opera pages in Microsoft browsers

If you like Opera, but find that some web pages don't display properly because they require Internet Explorer or Edge, there's a solution that gives you the best of both worlds. Head to Opera's Extensions store and install 'Open in Internet Explorer' (bit.ly/openinie415) and/or 'Open in Microsoft Edge (bit.ly/openinedge415). Now, when you come across a page that needs a Microsoft browser, just click the appropriate toolbar button. If IE or Edge is already running, the page will open in a new tab; if not, the button will launch the relevant browser.



Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

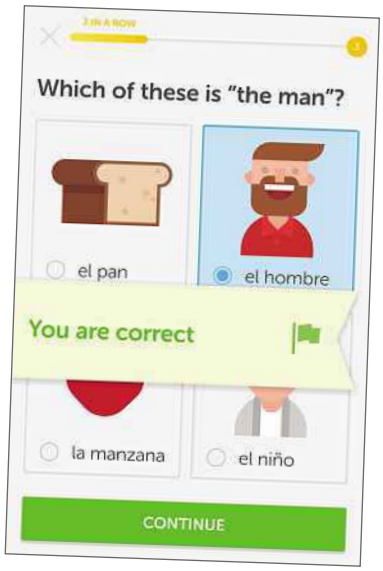
LANGUAGES

UPDATED

Duolingo

www.duolingo.com

(varies with device) 8

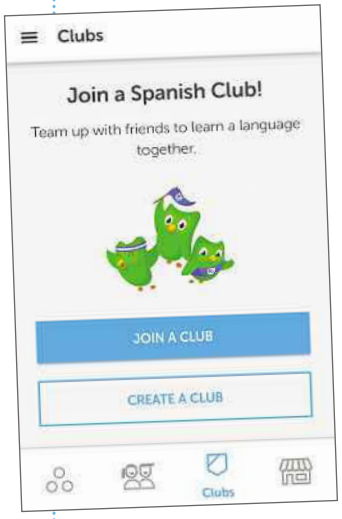


Duolingo has ways of making you talk in a variety of foreign languages, and now the app has an even better means of motivating you, by encouraging friendly competition.

Duolingo Clubs is a new section of the app that lets you create a tutorial group for your chosen language and invite up to 14 people to join. As you progress through bite-size interactive lessons, your achievements are updated on the club feed. You can add comments (in the language you're learning, of course) and emoji to congratulate or taunt other members while vying for the top spot on the weekly leaderboard.

It's amazingly addictive. After spending a few minutes setting up our Spanish-learning club, we'd intended to go and have dinner – but instead we spent more than an hour "playing" Spanish lessons against each other. The learning stuck, too. *Tu bebes agua?*

The lesson design is brilliant, but sadly this excellence doesn't extend to the setup side of Duolingo Clubs. You can't invite someone directly to join your club. Instead, you have to invite them to install Duolingo, then 'follow' each other, then ask them to search for your club and finally get them to enter a special code.



It would be a great shame if this long-winded process puts people off using Duolingo Clubs, because once you're in, it really works. Before you know it, you've learnt several phrases in Spanish, Dutch, Hindi or whatever language you've chosen for the club, and had great fun doing it.

Duolingo also makes an app for Windows Phone (bit.ly/duowin415), but at the time of writing it doesn't support Duolingo Clubs.

Our rating ★★★★★

MINI WORKSHOP

Create an interactive language-learning group using Duolingo Clubs

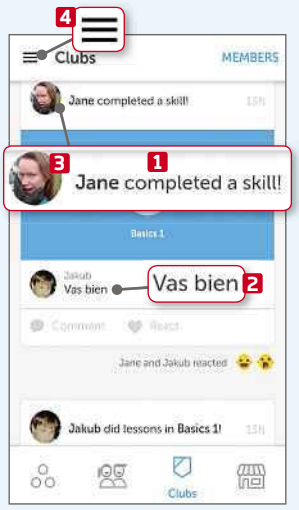
1 Install and launch Duolingo, then tap Get Started. Choose a language and a Daily Goal, then tap Continue. Tap the three-dots icon and choose 'Create a Profile' or Sign In. Tap 'Start at the basics' and go through a basic lesson. Finally, you'll see your Learn screen – your Duolingo hub for the language. 1 To invite a friend to install Duolingo, tap the Friends icon 2 then Add, Invite.



2 To create a club, tap the Clubs icon 1 and choose Create A Club. The club will be created for the language you chose in Step 1. Enter a club name, tap a badge and then tap Create. The Clubs screen will now show the name of your new club 2 and provide a code for inviting members. 3 Your friend will need to tap the Clubs icon and then Join A Club before entering the club name and code.



3 Once you have set up your club and invited members, any lessons ('skills' and 'achievements' in Duolingo lingo) that you complete will appear on your club feed. 1 Other club members can comment by tapping a translated phrase 2 and adding emoji. To add a profile photo, 3 tap the Learn icon, then the three-dots icon and View Profile. To add another language, tap the menu. 4



This fortnight's top free and paid-for apps for Android, iOS and Windows phones and tablets, and smart TVs

TRAVEL

Airport by Flio

UPDATED

www.flio.com

4.2 9



Have you ever gone on a weekend break only to spend half of it at the airport? Flio, or 'Airport by Flio' (it can't seem to decide) aims to get you through the terminal faster and more cheaply. It covers all major airports, including several in the UK, and provides full arrival and departure times, airport maps, directories and discounts for food and shopping, and tickets for shuttle buses and trains. The new version automatically connects you to free airport Wi-Fi, saving you the hassle of filling in fiddly registration forms on your phone.

Our rating ★★★★☆

BOOKS

Bookout

NEW

bit.ly/bookout415

9



Bookout is a fitness tracker for reading. Use its built-in ISBN (book barcode) scanner to tell it about the books you're reading and those you want to read, then record your progress. The app delivers statistics on your reading speed, average number of pages per day, hours spent reading every month and so on. You can also use Bookout to record your bibliographical history and save your favourite quotes. It's an interesting idea, but we found its search function limited, and we don't like the idea of reading as a "workout" rather than a pleasure.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

NOTES

Bear

NEW

www.bear-writer.com

9



To dismiss Bear as yet another notes app would be like calling the Palace of Versailles just another house. It's so beautiful that you almost don't want to defile it with your shopping list. Once you start using it, however, you'll find it invaluable. You can create notes and lists with tick boxes, formatted text, photos, hashtags and even markdown code (a kind of HTML-lite). Bear works well with long documents, too, so it could help you jump-start that novel. If you want to sync your work across devices, you'll need Bear Pro (£13.99 per year).

Our rating ★★★★☆

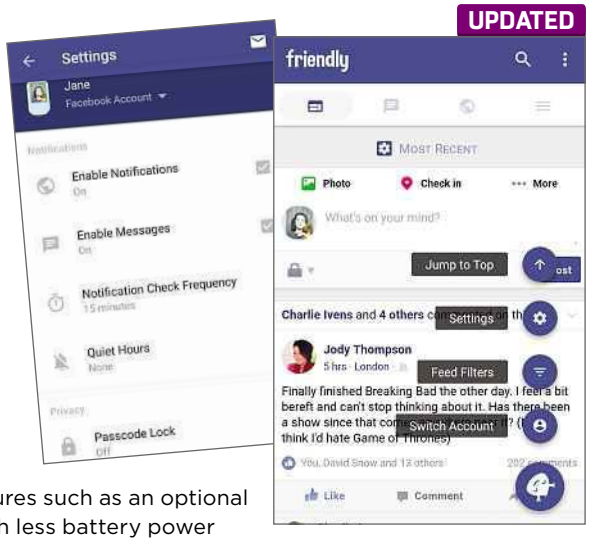
SOCIAL

Friendly for Facebook

UPDATED

friendly.io

4.4 7.1



Facebook's own mobile app is terrible. It shows only a narrow selection of your friends' posts and forces you to use the awful, battery-guzzling Messenger app for messages. Friendly, which is new to Android and updated for iOS, is a third-party Facebook client that does away with these and other irritations. It adds useful features such as an optional passcode lock, and uses much less battery power and data than Facebook or Messenger.

It's quick and easy to use and configure. Sign in using your Facebook login, then tap the Friendly face to choose your settings and feed filters. You can quickly switch between seeing 'Top Stories' and 'Most Recent' posts first; hide annoying features such as 'People You May Know'; and hide or highlight posts by keyword. You can even hide all photos and videos automatically. Only the ad blocker feature isn't free, but this 99p in-app purchase is clearly signposted.

Our rating ★★★★★

GET THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

Our updated Android MagBook is packed with 148 pages of apps, workshops and advice to unlock the full potential of your tablet and phone.



Discover how to:

- Master new tools in Lollipop and Marshmallow
- Stop apps leaking your personal data
- Record anything on your phone and tablet
- Prevent updates from wrecking your device
- Remove hidden junk so it never comes back
- Switch from iOS without losing data

Order it now from Amazon at bit.ly/androidbook2016

VIDEO

NEW

Gfycat Loops

bit.ly/gfydroid415
bit.ly/gfyios415
5 10



We've only just stopped worrying about whether to pronounce GIF with a soft or hard G. Then along comes Gfycat to confuse us even more. "Gfy"? Thankfully, the app is less silly than its name. Record a short video, edit it by cropping it and adding text and filters, and Gfycat automatically converts it to a GIF that you can share online. All recordings are saved to your device automatically. You can also create GIFs from stored photos or videos, and the Android version lets you use screenshots. The app includes an extensive library of stock GIFs, and there are no hidden costs or in-app purchases. Top cat!

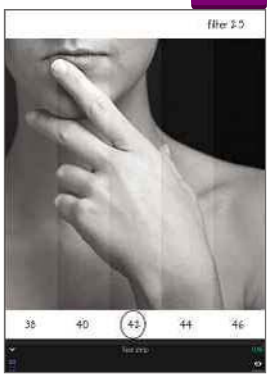
Our rating ★★★★★

PHOTOGRAPHY

NEW

Darkr

bit.ly/darkr415
8.1



Darkroom photographers use 'test strips' of paper to compare exposure times when developing photos. Darkr brings this trick to your iPhone and iPad. Shoot a black and white photo (or choose from your Camera Roll), then develop the 'negative' by selecting an exposure from a virtual test strip. You can then use advanced tools such as dodge and burn to make areas of the photo darker or brighter. It's not quick – be prepared to spend several minutes per photo – and many features, such as medium format-style shooting, toning filters and layers, cost 79p each as in-app purchases. If you have the patience, though, it offers great potential.

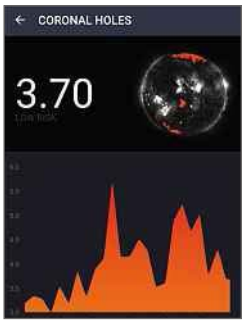
Our rating ★★★☆☆

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

NATURAL DISASTERS

Disaster Prediction App

spaceweathernews.com
Price: £2.89 (Android), £2.29 (iOS)
4 8

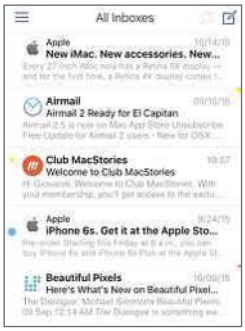


Predict earthquakes and solar storms using data from paranoid weather watchers around the world (www.suspiciousObservers.org). It's always handy to know if your house is about to fall down.

EMAIL

Airmail

bit.ly/airmail415
Price: £3.99
9



The best alternative to Apple's built-in Mail app has relaunched with support for custom actions. For example, you can configure a right-swipe to archive a message or set a label. It also integrates with Bear (see page 33).

MUSIC

Spoticast for Spotify

bit.ly/spoticast415
Price: £3.89
10 Mobile



Windows Mobile has its own official Spotify app, but it can't hold a candle to Spoticast. This updated app lets you download tracks for offline listening without having to cough up for Spotify Premium. It works on Windows 10 PCs, too.

VOICE ASSISTANT

Astra for Alexa

bit.ly/astra415
Price: £2.29
9



Astra is a smart personal assistant that supports Amazon's Alexa voice-control platform. It doesn't look like much – it's just a pink screen that listens and responds – but if you like Siri, you'll love Astra.

SPACE

Hello Mars

bit.ly/hellomars415
Price: 99p
4.4



Explore Mars in 3D virtual reality using data from NASA's Mars missions. The highlight is an immersive VR recreation of landing on Mars, which NASA has dubbed "seven minutes of terror".

Disaster Prediction App | Airmail | Spoticast for Spotify | Astra for Alexa | Hello Mars

Best New TV Apps & Games

TV & FILM

All 4 for Android

bit.ly/all415

(varies)

Channel 4 has tweaked the Android version of its video-streaming app to make it work on a wider range of phones and tablets, and allow screen 'mirroring' on compatible devices. Additionally, the app's home screen has been redesigned to showcase the most popular shows available to watch on demand on Channel 4, E4, More4 and Film4, and to offer one-tap access to live streaming of those channels. The app also offers editors' picks from All 4's huge archive, provides recommendations tailored to your tastes and displays shortcuts to programmes you've started viewing, so you can resume playback instantly.



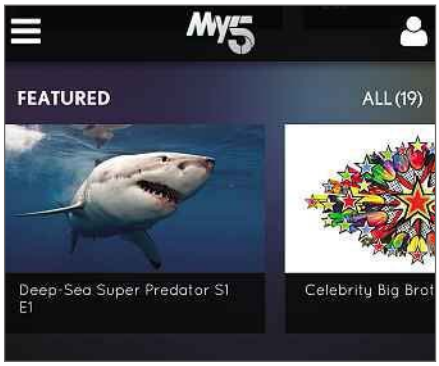
TV & FILM

My5

bit.ly/my5android415

bit.ly/my5ios415

4.4 7



Following a major rebrand and relaunch last year when it changed its name from Demand 5, Channel 5 failed to pay much attention to My5, consigning the app to thousands of negative reviews from unhappy viewers. Now, finally, the broadcaster has added Chromecast support, so you can stream *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *Big Brother* and other popular shows from your phone or tablet to your TV. The feature is available on both Android and iOS, although you need to register to unlock all the content and, unlike other TV services, you still can't stream live channels. At least it's a step in the right direction.

GAME

Grumpy Cat's Worst Game Ever

bit.ly/grumpyandroid415

bit.ly/grumpyios415

4.1 8

Based on the popular meme, this game sardonically promises to be the "worst you will ever play", but it's actually a lot of fun. It invites you to play "awful" mini games involving the titular miserable feline, which include such activities as catching goldfish, chasing red dots, whacking moles and pulling needles. You win prizes and collect new characters along the way, with daily missions to complete, and can share your high scores and challenge your friends to beat them. Aside from occasional ads, the biggest annoyance is the jaunty soundtrack, but you can turn this off in the app's settings. Meow!

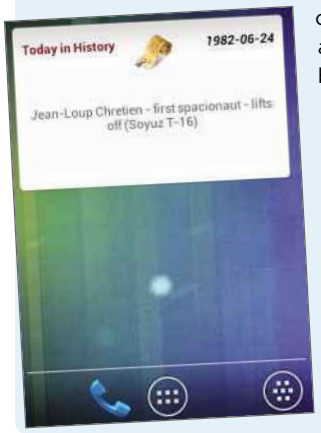


✗ Don't install...

Today in History

bit.ly/today415

We like the idea of an app that expands your historical knowledge by telling you about interesting things that happened on this day in the past. But Today in History, which is more of a widget than an app, does the bare minimum, simply presenting a date and a fact, without providing any context, illustration or even a link to further information online. Additionally, it costs 84p whereas superior apps are free!



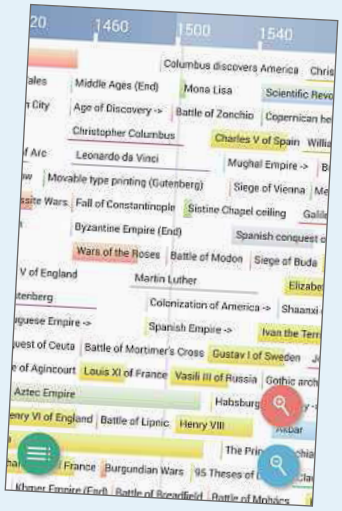
...Install this instead ✓

History Timeline

bit.ly/history415

3.2

Which happened first – Columbus' discovery of America or the end of the Wars of the Roses? When did the first computer become operational? Where were the first oil wells drilled? You can get the answers to these questions and thousands more from this marvellous new app, which traces the entire history of the world in an interactive timeline. You can either swipe through millennia of all notable events or filter entries by category – such as Wars, Leaders or The Arts – or region. Tap an item to open the relevant article on Wikipedia or bookmark it for later. History Timeline is very comprehensive and couldn't be easier to use. ■



FAQ

Everything you need to know about the most interesting new technology trends and events

Best of CES 2017

As usual, the annual Consumer Electronics Show shone a light on the future of tech. **David Crookes** rounds up the most interesting devices showcased in Las Vegas

OLLY

heyolly.com



Why is it interesting?

Olly appears to be yet another smart lifestyle assistant that performs actions based on your verbal commands. But unlike Amazon Echo, this speaker-based robot grows a unique personality tailored to your needs. Olly detects when you're in the room, notes what you're doing and adapts its behaviour accordingly to play suitable music, control internet-connected devices and offer information and advice to suit your current mood.

When's it out?

The robot was still at the prototype stage at CES, but creator Emotech says the Olly should be available later in the year.

How much will it cost?

There has been no indication of price as yet but to compete with its rivals, we'd expect Olly to cost less than £200.

Do I really need one?

If you find the Amazon Echo too staid, then Olly's pivoting, flashing lights and Johnny Five-style reactions will provide you with company as well as functionality.

NETATMO SMART SMOKE DETECTOR www.netatmo.com

Why is it interesting?

Netatmo's smart smoke detector doesn't pick up on carbon monoxide emissions but its battery lasts for 10 years and it makes sure it's in tip-top shape by checking itself every second. It also works with IFTTT and Apple's HomeKit, which means it can alert other smart devices as soon as it goes off.



When's it out?

It's due in the second half of 2017.

How much will it cost?

No price details have been released.

Do I really need it?

If your existing smoke alarms are due to be changed, then a smart detector is worth considering. With an 85-decibel alarm and the ability to silence it by phone, it can alert you without piercing your eardrums.

RICOH R CAMERA www.ricohr.ricoh/en

Why is it interesting?

This impressive camera can live-stream fully spherical, 360-degree videos for 24 hours at a time, and record them to microSD cards. It's the first camera of its kind that can capture footage for such a lengthy period and it does so in 2K resolution at 30 frames per second, using special technology to stitch the images together in real-time.



How much will it cost?

There has been no indication of price yet.

When's it out?

It is expected to be released in the spring.

Do I really need one?

The Ricoh R is bundled within a Development Kit, and is primarily aimed at professionals. However, it should provide lots of virtual-reality content for the host of VR headsets now available.

FARADAY FUTURE FF91

www.ff.com

Why is it interesting?





Faraday Future's FF91 looks to have taken the lead in the race to deliver self-driving cars. Not only will it have 10 cameras, 13 short- and long-range radars and 12 sensors to help ease it through the streets, it will go from 0-60mph in 2.39 seconds which, the company says, is far zippier than the Tesla Model S.

When's it out?

Faraday hopes the first cars will be hitting the roads in 2018, starting with the US, Canada and China.

How much will it cost?

All we know at this stage is that you need to put down a refundable $5,000 (£4,034) deposit. Rumours are that the car will cost from $150,000 (£121,032)!

Do I really need one?

Probably not – at least until the price comes down. But electric cars finally look like they have a significant future ahead of them.

HIMIRROR

www.himirror.com

Why is it interesting?

It's not quite up to the capabilities of the magic mirror in Snow White, but this is undoubtedly one smart mirror. Operated via voice control or gestures, it uses a camera to scan your face and assess the health of your skin before alerting you to wrinkles, blemishes, dark circles, spots, fine lines and pores.

By analysing the data HiMirror receives, you can track changes over a period of time, syncing the data to a smartphone app. The idea is that you alter your skincare regime to help improve your complexion while getting an idea of which products work best for you. A more advanced version – the HiMirror Plus – recreates five lighting situations so you can see how you'd look in, say, a supermarket or a brightly lit office.

When's it out?

HiMirror is out now.



How much will it cost?

It is only listed at its US price of $189 (£153).

Do I really need one?

If you like to experiment with beauty products or you're concerned about the ravages of age, HiMirror is a good way to keep an eye on the condition of your skin. Other family members can use it to stream music and listen to internet radio.

HTC VIVE TRACKER

www.vive.com/uk

Why is it interesting?



The Vive Tracker is a tiny peripheral you can use in conjunction with the HTC Vive virtual-reality headset. When it's attached to any real-world object, it brings that item into the VR environment, effectively turning anything around you into a virtual-reality toy. It can also be fixed to a DSLR camera to create mixed-reality videos. Mind-bending stuff, for sure.

When's it out?

The sensors should be available to consumers in the second half of the year, with developers set to get their hands on them over the coming months.

How much will it cost?

The price has not been revealed.

Do I really need it?

HTC Vive offers top-notch VR but it comes at a price. If you've already invested, then we'd say the Vive Tracker will make the experience even more immersive and realistic.

LEGO BOOST

www.lego.com/boost

Why is it interesting?



You can build robots with Lego Mindstorms, but you have to use bricks from the Technics range rather than those you're likely to have knocking around the house. Lego Boost is much more versatile, letting you use ordinary Lego bricks to build five hi-tech models, including a moving robot rover, a playable electric guitar, an interactive purring cat and even a mini-factory that automatically builds small Lego models for you.





Boost will be based around a Move Hub that has Bluetooth Low Energy connectivity and an interactive motor, as well as colour and distance sensors. The set will be accompanied by a free Lego Boost app for iOS and Android that lets you bring your robots to life.

When's it out?

Lego will launch Boost in August

How much will it cost?

The starter set will cost $160 in the US, which is around £130, but don't be surprised if it costs £160 over here.

Do I really need it?

Yes! We can see this becoming the must-have toy for 2017, introducing scores of children (and adults, of course) to the delights of imaginative robotics and programming at a relatively low price.



WHY YOUR Wi-Fi IS STILL SLOW

COVER FEATURE

Don't put up with slow, unreliable internet. **Wayne Williams** explains how you can identify the causes of a weak connection and quickly get back up to speed



Recent research by Ofcom (bit.ly/ofcom415) found that the average download speed for home broadband in the UK is now an impressive 37Mbps (although some rural areas struggle to get 2Mbps). But that doesn't mean everyone enjoys superfast speeds all the time.

Running a test using a tool such as Ookla Speedtest (www.speedtest.net – see page 43) may confirm that your connection isn't as fast as it should be, but it won't tell you how to fix the problem. In this feature, we explain the most common reasons for slow internet and reveal the secret tweaks that unlock extra speed.

Over the following six pages, we look at which hardware upgrades are worth the money, the router settings you should be using and the main causes of weak Wi-Fi and common network problems. We also explain how you can test your connection speed, so you can find out exactly where the dead spots are in your home and what improvements your changes have made.

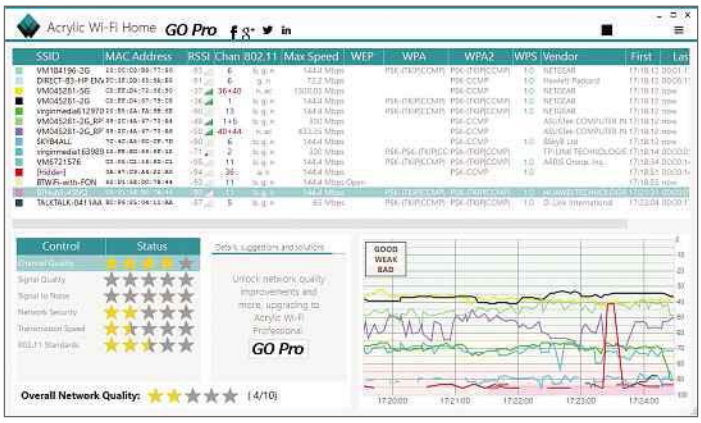
HACK YOUR ROUTER SETTINGS

Don't share a channel with neighbours

Wireless routers can transmit on a choice of channels. If you and your neighbours are broadcasting on the same wireless channel, it can result in a weakened Wi-Fi signal. Checking which channels are being used by households in your vicinity and switching to an alternative channel could make a big difference to your internet speed.

Acrylic Wi-Fi Home (www.acrylicwifi.com) is a handy free scanner that lists all the wireless networks within range and shows you their SSID, MAC address, channel, 802.11 standard (see page 42), security type, router manufacturer and other information. Select any network to see a star rating for its channel quality, signal quality, signal-to-noise ratio, network security, transmission speed and 802.11 standards coverage. Acrylic also rates each network for overall quality, so you can see any available options that provide a better connection.

You can sort the list of networks by their channel to make it easier to pick one that isn't currently being used (or isn't being used in close proximity to your network, at least). To change the channel, open the web page for your router's settings – this is usually at 192.168.1.1 or similar, and provided in a label on your router – and look for the Channels option there. See our Mini Workshop on page 39 to learn more about using Acrylic Wi-Fi Home.



Use Acrylic Wi-Fi Home to find the fastest and least busy local Wi-Fi network



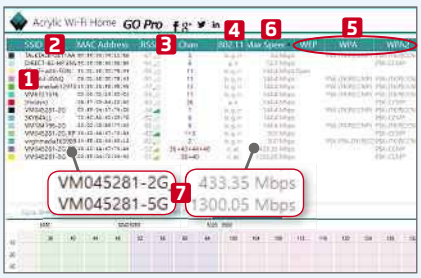
Use the 5GHz band if possible to get optimum Wi-Fi speed and coverage

Choose the correct Wi-Fi band

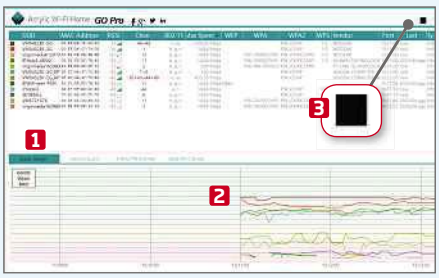
Many modern 802.11n routers, and all 802.11ac models, offer simultaneous dual-band Wi-Fi. This means that two networks run concurrently – one on the 2.4GHz band and one on the 5GHz band. The router creates separate SSIDs (wireless-network names) for each band, usually with '2' (or '2.4') and '5' in the name, to make it easy to select the one you want to connect your devices to. Putting some thought into which band you use for which equipment can make a big difference to your Wi-Fi speed and coverage.

Ideally, you should use the 2.4GHz band for older equipment, with newer devices – especially anything streaming video – assigned to the less congested 5GHz band. Some routers, such as the standard Virgin Media SuperHub, offer 'selectable' dual-band, rather than 'simultaneous', which means you can only use one of the two bands. If possible, switch to the 5GHz band because this will give you the best results – it's less prone to interference, and there's more room. If you have older devices that can't connect to the 5GHz band, you have three choices: you can

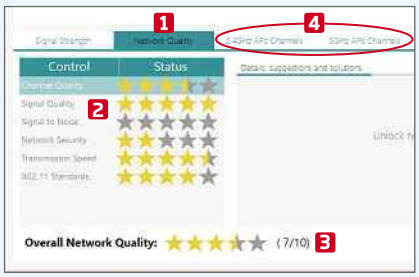
MINI WORKSHOP | Monitor your Wi-Fi using Acrylic Wi-Fi Home



1 Download and run Acrylic Wi-Fi Home (www.acrylicwifi.com) and you'll be presented with a comprehensive list of wireless networks within range. 1 You can sort the list by SSID, 2 Channel, 3, 802.11 standard 4 and encryption type. 5 The Max Speed column 6 shows how much faster the 5GHz band is. 7



2 The Signal Strength tab 1 shows a colour-coded graph 2 which lets you see the quality of each network signal over time. The higher up the line, the better the signal. You can stop and start monitoring at any point using the button in the top-right corner. 3



3 Click the Network Quality tab 1 and select one of the networks above to get a star rating for various categories. 2 The overall network quality is given a rating out of 10. 3 You can see how the 2.4GHz and 5GHz channels compare by selecting either of those tabs. 4

use the 2.4GHz band for everything; upgrade your older devices so they can connect to the 5GHz network; or upgrade your router to a simultaneous dual-band model.

Change your router's security settings

Your router offers a choice of encryption standards, such as WPA Auto, WPA2-PSK [AES] and WPA-PSK [TKIP]. When setting it up, you probably went with whatever the default setting was, but choose incorrectly and you could end up with a less secure and slower network.

TKIP is considered insecure and should be avoided, and WPA or TKIP encryption will slow a faster Wi-Fi router to 54Mbps. If your router offers WPA2-PSK (AES), select this because it's the most secure option. AES support has been mandatory in all devices manufactured after 2006, so everything you own (unless it's very old) should work fine. If you find certain devices can't connect to your Wi-Fi once you've switched to a faster, more secure option, then you may need to switch back to the original setting. It usually takes around a minute for the change to take effect.



Change your router's default encryption standard to stop it slowing your Wi-Fi

FIND AND FIX NETWORK ERRORS

Change to a different DNS server

DNS (Domain Name System) is used to translate site names into IP addresses so that they can be understood by web servers and internet routers. When you enter a web address into your browser, there will be a small delay while the browser asks your DNS server for the IP address of the site before it starts to load it. Most people tend to stick with the DNS server provided by their ISP, but it may not be the fastest and switching to a different one could speed up the lookup time. Even if you decide to stick with the DNS server provided by your ISP, it's worth running a check to see how it compares with other servers.



Speed up your internet by switching to another DNS server using DNS Jumper

DNS Jumper (bit.ly/dnsjump415) is a fantastic free program that lets you quickly switch to an alternative DNS sever without having to enter the details manually in Windows. All you have to do is run it (no installation is required) and click the Fastest DNS button. It will list numerous DNS servers and you can test them all, or narrow the results by ticking the ones you want and unticking those you don't. Click Start DNS Test and the program will benchmark each server. Every server gets tested twice, and the list is reordered according to the results.

To switch to the fastest result, click the Apply DNS Server button. You can also right-click any other result in the list and apply that instead. Before making any changes, it's worth running the test several times during the day, just to make sure the results remain constant.

If you want to make sure you're always using the fastest DNS server, there's an option to have the program start alongside Windows, check for the fastest DNS server and switch to it automatically.

We'll be providing more advice on taking control of your DNS in next issue's Weekend Project.

Stop your ISP throttling your traffic

ISPs often used to throttle certain types of traffic – BitTorrent downloads in particular – to stop heavy internet users consuming all the available bandwidth. This kind of traffic shaping is much less common these days, although it does still happen with some ISPs and at certain times – usually evenings and weekends when the internet is at its busiest. If you suspect your ISP is throttling your downloads, check the terms and conditions to see what it says about traffic management. Remember, if you're downloading or browsing at peak time, then things will automatically be slower due to congestion. If you use BitTorrent, try scheduling downloads for after 1am. Use Wi-Fi when downloading or streaming on your phone to avoid the risk of throttling.

Speed up your 3G connection

This may come as a surprise, but we've found that using a mobile data connection can occasionally be faster than using public Wi-Fi. For example, O2's free Wi-Fi – which can be found in places such as Costa and McDonalds – is often dreadful.

The general rule is that 4G connections are very fast; 3G should be decent; and anything else will be hit and miss. However, 3G speeds can often be improved. Opera Max for Android (bit.ly/opmax415) can speed up browsing on both a wireless and mobile network. It compresses content before it reaches your phone, so you download less data.

For speedier browsing, you could turn off images in your browser (so it just loads text) and also try clearing the cache in any apps that are having problems. In Android, go to Settings, Applications, select the app you want, and tap Clear Cache.



Opera Max reduces the data downloaded over a mobile or Wi-Fi connection

PREVENT PHYSICAL WI-FI PROBLEMS

Avoid interference from objects

Where you place your router can have a big impact on the quality of your wireless signal. If you place it near an exterior wall, some of the signal will extend outside your property; and locating it under a desk or in a cupboard will reduce the power of the signal. Ideally, you should position your router somewhere central – on top of a desk, rather than under it – and away from any other electrical items or cables. As a rule, the higher up you place the router, the better the signal.



The higher up you place your router, the more powerful its signal will be

If the router has adjustable aerials, make sure they point into the room. It's worth having them perpendicular in relation to each other – so one is horizontal and the other vertical – because this will spread the signal around and hopefully improve it. You can use reflective surfaces to bounce the wireless signal around any particularly troublesome objects, although your living space may end up looking like a hall of mirrors!

Stop your neighbours piggybacking

If you suspect that someone outside your home might be using your wireless connection, you can check by logging into your router. Open your web browser and go to the router address (this will probably be printed on a label attached to your router), then enter your router's username and password. Look for a Device Connection Status screen (or similar) and browse the list of wired and wireless devices connected to your network. It will show you a device's name and how long it has been connected for. Look for anything you don't recognise.



Find out if someone naughty is piggybacking on your wireless network

Keep away from household appliances

Electrical devices around the home – specifically ones with motors, such as blenders – can cause interference and degrade the quality of your Wi-Fi. Cordless phones (if you still have a landline), baby monitors and microwaves can also have an impact. If you don't have much of a signal in your kitchen as it is, you'll find it drops even more when the microwave is on. The signal will improve the further you move from the source of the interference.

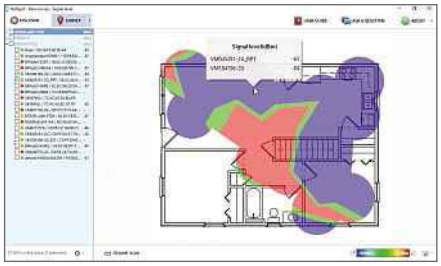


Slow Wi-Fi could be caused by a kitchen appliance such as a blender

Bearing this in mind, you need to make sure your router is as far away as possible from any potentially problematic electrical devices, and steer clear of them when you use your phone or tablet to go online.

Locate dead spots on a heat map

It's possible that the wireless-network coverage in your home is a little patchy. If you can identify the weak areas, then you can work on improving the Wi-Fi there – perhaps by moving the router or using range extenders. The free tool NetSpot (www.netspotapp.com) can create a colour-coded 'heat map' of your home that shows where the wireless signal is strongest and weakest. You can create heat maps for both the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands, which will let you see which network works best in each room.



Use Netspot to create a heat map of the wireless coverage around your home

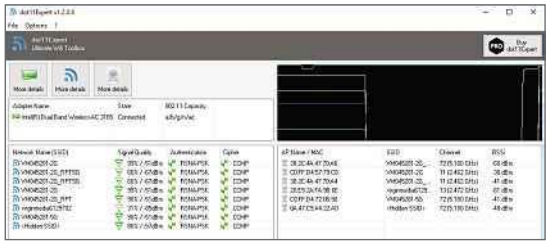
To record the results so that NetSpot can build a map, you have to move around each location in your property, so installing the program on your laptop is the ideal solution.

Diagnose network-adapter problems

Your wireless network can be slowed down by all kinds of elements, and identifying the root of the problem can be tricky. KC Softwares offers a Wi-Fi troubleshooting tool called dot11Expert (bit.ly/dot11expert415) that provides detailed technical information about your adapters, network and access points.

It displays three panels filled with information, and double-clicking an item displays additional details to help you pinpoint the cause of problems. There aren't many settings to play around with, but dot11Expert could come in handy for identifying hitherto undiagnosed problems.

Make sure you download the free version rather than clicking the link for the paid-for Pro edition.



Use dot11Expert to discover the cause of problems with your network adapter

Replace your ageing router

If your router is more than a few years old, it's likely that you'll be getting slower and weaker Wi-Fi than you used to, and certainly nowhere near the optimum speed of your current internet package. The first 802.11 WLAN (Wireless Local Area Network) standard was created in 1997 by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and, since then, there have been numerous revisions, with each updated standard offering faster speeds and greater coverage. See the table above for a list of the main standards and the theoretical transfer rates they promise.

There are many other standards, too, including 802.11ad, 802.11ax and 802.11ay, but you don't need to worry about those for the moment because they're not yet widely available. The data rates listed in our table don't exist outside of laboratory conditions, so in the real world you'd experience much lower speeds, but they do provide an indication of how much better each of the major standards is in comparison to its predecessors.

If your router is particularly old, it probably offers 802.11g, in which case you should definitely upgrade it. If it offers 802.11n, you'll get a reasonable speed but, in all honesty, upgrading to a 802.11ac router will pay dividends and is well worth doing – especially if you frequently stream music, TV shows and films over your network.

There is a caveat, which is that to get the most from an 802.11ac router, you need to be using 802.11ac devices; anything that doesn't support the new standard will only receive speeds comparable to 802.11n. The good news is that most newer mobile devices, including iPhone 7 and Samsung Galaxy S7, do support this latest standard.

Even if you don't currently have any 802.11ac equipment, a modern router using that standard will result in better and stronger signals over a wider area. For example, we recently swapped an 802.11n Virgin Media SuperHub for the newer 802.11ac model, and the difference in coverage was immediately noticeable, with dropped connections no longer a problem.

If you don't want to replace your router just yet, it's worth checking the manufacturer's or supplier's website to see if there's a firmware update you can apply. This should give your Wi-Fi a performance boost while improving its security.

MAIN WI-FI STANDARDS & THEORETICAL TRANSFER RATES

Standard	Year	Frequency	Data Rate
802.11	1997	2.4GHz	2Mbps
802.11a	1999	5GHz	54Mbps
802.11b	1999	2.4GHz	11Mbps
802.11g	2003	2.4GHz	54Mbps
802.11n	2009	2.4GHz/5GHz	600Mbps
802.11ac	2014	2.4GHz/5GHz	1300Mbps

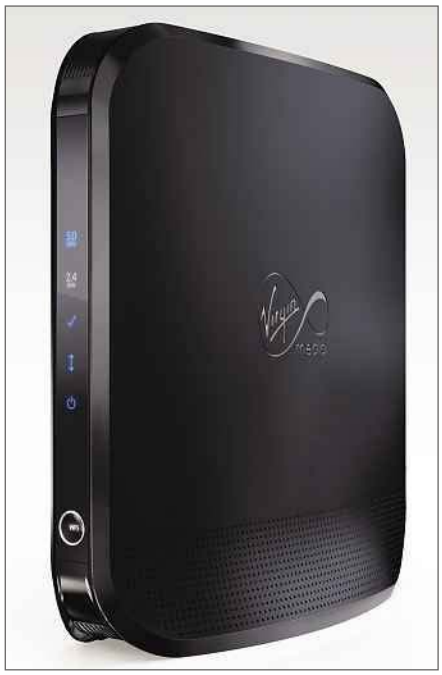


The TP-Link RE450 won the Gold Award in our Group Test of Wi-Fi extenders

Invest in a wireless extender

You can improve the coverage of your wireless connection using an extender, which takes your existing Wi-Fi signal and repeats it via a plug-in unit. You can add multiple units to your home to extend the Wi-Fi to places it doesn't usually reach. However, we've found that the results can be hit and miss depending on which model you buy.

In our Group Test of Wi-Fi extenders in Issue 414 of *Web User* (bit.ly/



The best way to fix slow and weak Wi-Fi signals is to upgrade your router



HomePlugs such as Devolo's offer a quick and easy way to extend your Wi-Fi

webuser414), we found the TP-Link RE450 delivered the strongest Wi-Fi signal, especially on the 5GHz frequency, covering dead spots that similar devices couldn't reach. TP-Link claims it can achieve speeds of 1,750Mbps, although it's unlikely you'll get near that figure. The extender costs £45 from Amazon (bit.ly/tpl414) and is very easy to set up, with three adjustable antennae for achieving optimal coverage.

Alternatively, you could use HomePlugs to boost your connection. The excellent Devolo dLAN Wi-Fi adapters (bit.ly/dlanwifi415) extend your internet to any room using your home's electrical wiring, without any signal loss, and act as a reliable and unobtrusive Wi-Fi extender. The dLAN 1200+ WiFi ac Starter Kit Powerline (bit.ly/dlanwc415) costs £160 and includes one standard unit and one Wi-Fi AC adapter.

Upgrade to a mesh network

If you want to be certain of having rock-solid wireless coverage throughout your entire home, then buying a mesh router system is the perfect solution. Rather than a single router, a mesh network is a modular Wi-Fi system with multiple access points that work together to ensure great coverage without lag or buffering. Each node increases wireless coverage by around 2,000 square feet, and you can add as many as you like. A mesh network uses a single name and password.

Linksys recently launched the Velop Whole-Home Mesh network with Dynamic Tri-Band technology (bit.ly/velop415), which will eliminate dead spots throughout your home – even in difficult-to-reach places such as your loft or garden. However, it's not cheap: a single unit costs £199.99, a twin pack is £349.99 and a triple pack is £499.99. On the plus side, it works with Amazon's Alexa technology so you can use voice commands such as "turn on guest access to Wi-Fi". ■



Linksys Velop isn't cheap, but it delivers "flawless" Wi-Fi around your home

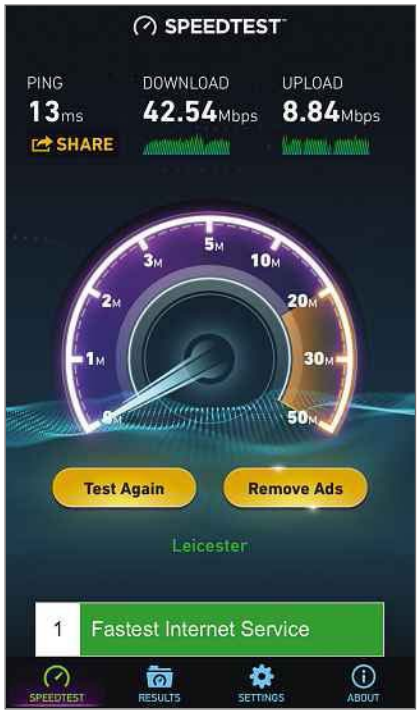
TEST YOUR CONNECTION USING OOKLA

If you suspect that your internet speed is slower than it should be, you can find out for sure using Ookla Speedtest (www.speedtest.net). There are two website versions – the main one, which uses Flash, and the beta version (beta.speedtest.net), which doesn't. There's also a Chrome extension (bit.ly/speed415).

The test measures 'ping time' – that is, the length of time it takes for a site to receive an incoming connection and reply – as well as your download and upload speeds. You should run it several times a day to get an average. To see how your wireless network connection affects speeds, run the test on a laptop in different areas of the house.

There's also a mobile version for iOS, Android and Windows 10 (speedtest.net/mobile), which you can use to get a good idea of signal strength and connection speed anywhere around your home. Use this whenever you think there could be a problem with your internet performance.

It's worth running a test before and after rebooting your router, to see what sort of difference that makes. Also, try running a test next to a working microwave or blender to get an idea of how such appliances can affect your wireless connection. You'll be surprised!



Ookla Speedtest is the best way to confirm that your Wi-Fi is too slow

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 8 February 2017

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO KODI

We pick the ultimate add-ons, round up the best boxes and reveal the sneaky hacks they don't want you to know

PLUS...

STOP BROWSER LEAKS
Discover the personal data you're unwittingly sharing

WINDOWS 10 SECRETS
Take back control of all the settings hidden by Microsoft

UNDO MOBILE MISTAKES
Instantly recover from blunders on your phone

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Best free sticky-notes software



Is your workspace drowning in a sea of Post-It notes? Chuck them out and transfer their vital information to the Desktop of your PC. **Andy Shaw** tests six of the best tools to do it

Stickies | bit.ly/stickies415 | ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★☆

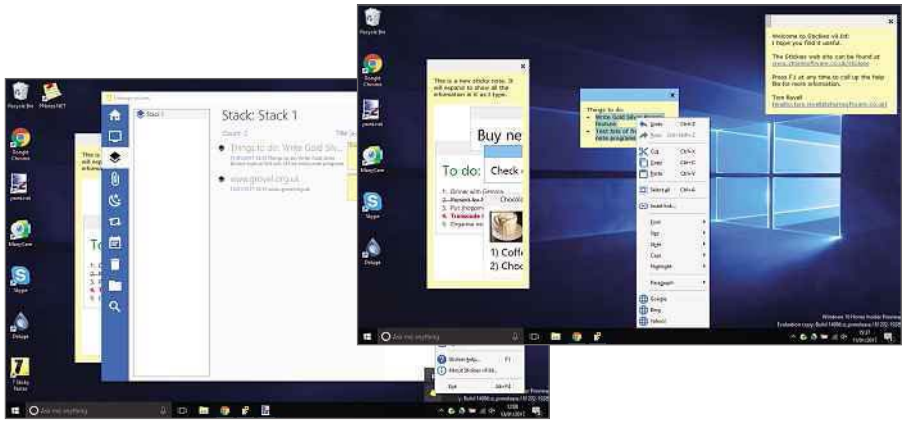
WebUser GOLD AWARD

What we liked:

Many of the apps and programs that let you stick Post-it-style notes on your PC's Desktop take the concept literally, by letting you type your reminders onto a series of yellow squares. While you can certainly do that with Stickies, you can also do lots more. In fact you can do so much more, the options border on becoming overwhelming. Don't worry, though – nothing is overly complicated so you can take on as many or as few of the extra options as you want, and explore further tools at your own pace.

Rather than launching and running as a regular program and taking up space on the taskbar, Stickies operates from a small icon in the notification area, a bit like a security program. To add a new note, just press Ctrl+N and start typing. You can resize and rearrange your notes as you please. Any other applications you open will appear over the top of your Stickies; then, if you want to see them, just left-click the icon in the notification area to bring them back to the top. You can also choose to have your notes always on top if you prefer.

Right-click the taskbar icon and you'll see the extent of Stickies' tools and options. You can organise your notes into stacks (folders that collect together notes for a particular project) and select options for how they're saved and managed. There's even a separate Manage Stickies window from where you can rearrange and archive your notes.



As well as simple text, you can paste almost anything into a Stickie, including images, web addresses and even file attachments. If you want to get really sophisticated, you can share notes with other people over your network, and there's a solid backup-and-restore option, so you can ensure that your notes are never lost and even transfer them to another PC.

How it can be improved:

There are a lot of sophisticated options available and the software pops up a Help document when you first launch it, which is a bit overwhelming. A link to a video intro with further tutorials for advanced users might be a better way to get all this information across.

OUR VERDICT

Stickies lets you display almost anything in its notes but don't be put off by its range of options. They're there when you want them but you can just as easily start off using it as a simple note tool.

Sticky Notes | bit.ly/stno415 | ★★★★☆

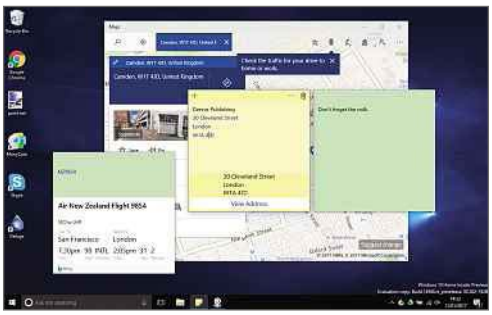
FEATURES ★★★☆☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★★

WebUser SILVER AWARD

What we liked:

Sticky Notes is Microsoft's take on displaying Post-it-style notes on your Desktop and it comes preinstalled with Windows 10, so it's ready to use whenever you want. It's recently undergone a significant update that lifts it above the basics, analysing the content of notes and integrating with other Windows 10 apps to make your sticky notes more functional and to link them to your other programs. For example, typing a web address into a note creates a clickable link; a street address creates a link to Microsoft's Maps app; and a flight number adds known details about the flight to the bottom of the note.

You can choose from six different colours for your notes, which is handy for organising them, and you can resize and rearrange them in whatever way you like. There's not much more to it, but if all you want to do is create and display some simple reminders, this is the easiest way.



How it could be improved:

There are a lot of things that you can't put into a Sticky Note, including images, which is a significant oversight. You also can't perform any text formatting, such as adding bullet-pointed to-do lists, changing fonts or adding bold or italics.

OUR VERDICT

If all you want to do is paste a reminder or two onto your Desktop, Sticky Notes does the job and it's ready to use because it's already installed. Apart from its ability to recognise types of text, though, it offers little else beyond the basics.

7 Sticky Notes | www.7stickynotes.com | ★★★★☆

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★★★

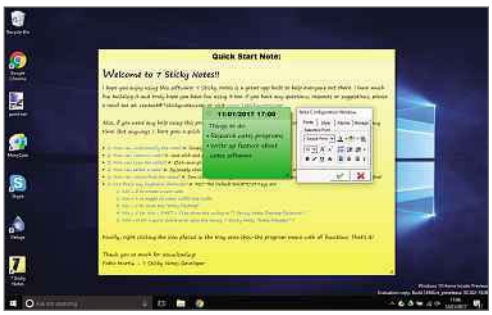
WebUser BRONZE AWARD

What we liked:

7 Sticky Notes has as many tools and features as Stickes, but is styled in a slightly different way, with many of its tools focused on the presentation of notes. When you create a new note – by right-clicking its icon in the notification area and selecting the option from a pop-up menu – it automatically adds the date and time in the title bar, though you can overwrite this if you want.

It also opens a Note Configuration Window containing lots of icons for formatting your typed text. If you want to spend time making your notes look just right, adding bullet points and highlighting, this is the right tool for the job. However, it defaults to a handwriting font, which we weren't keen on.

The Configuration Window includes tabs containing more tools, such as alarms that can be set to alert you about a note at a particular time.



How it can be improved:

This software hasn't been updated since 2013 and looks suspiciously like it might have been abandoned. As a result, the interface is starting to look a little outdated when run alongside other modern Windows programs.

OUR VERDICT

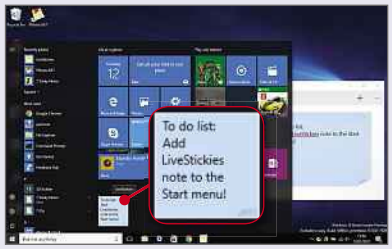
If you find the Gold Award-winning Stickies a bit overwhelming, you may find 7 Sticky Notes more friendly and easy to use. However, it's looking a bit dated and may never receive another update.

BEST OF THE REST

LiveStickies

bit.ly/live415

This Windows 10 app has a unique trick up its sleeve. Instead of displaying notes on your Desktop, it pins them to the Start menu, which is a handy and easily accessible place to keep them. If you like the idea of sticky notes but don't want to clutter your Desktop, this is a great tool – but it doesn't do anything else.



PNotes.net

pnotes.sourceforge.net

PNotes.net lets you create sticky notes on your screen but it doesn't do it in a particularly clever way. For example, when you add a new note, it appears in the exact centre of your screen, even if there's another note already there, so you're likely to accumulate a pile of notes hidden behind one another.



StickyPad

bit.ly/spad415

StickyPad is a simple and straightforward sticky-note tool but it has a number of drawbacks. For starters, it uses Windows XP-style icons, which look very dated, and you can't use non-text elements such as images in your notes. It also turns every note into a Desktop icon, even if it's closed, which creates a lot of Desktop clutter.



Switch from one provider to another



Companies don't make it easy for you to move to their competitors, but don't let that put you off. **Edward Munn** explains how to make an easy switch

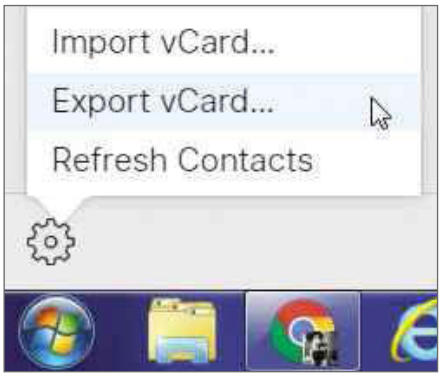
MOVE BETWEEN iOS AND ANDROID

If you're trading in your Android phone for an iPhone, you can transfer most of your important data by installing Apple's free Android app Move to iOS (bit.ly/move415) and following its simple on-screen instructions. Unfortunately, there's no equivalent app to take care of the switch from iPhone to Android, but the process is straightforward if you know what to do.



Contacts

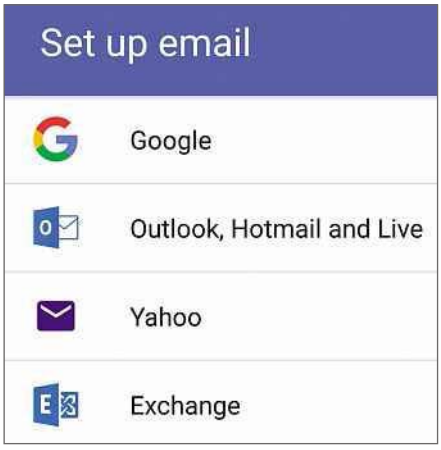
If your contacts are saved to your Google account, just set up your Android device with this account and they'll automatically appear in the Contacts app. If, however, your contacts are saved to iCloud, you'll need to go to www.icloud.com in your Desktop browser, log in and click Contacts. From this page, click the settings cog, choose Select All, then click the cog again and



choose 'Export vCard'. Now, in your browser, go to your Gmail account, click the drop-down menu and select Contacts. Select More and Import, then click 'CSV or vCard file' and follow the on-screen instructions to upload your contacts. Once uploaded, your contacts will automatically appear in the Contacts app on your Android device.

Email and SMS

If you use Gmail, you'll be able to access your inbox as soon as you've logged into your Google account on your Android device. If, however, you use a different IMAP email account such as iCloud or Yahoo Mail, you can try using



the 'Add account' option in Gmail's sidebar. Alternatively, you can install an email app that supports IMAP from the Google Play store – our favourite is Type App (bit.ly/typeapp415). You'll receive SMS messages on the Android phone as soon as you install your SIM card, but it's important to disable iMessage before doing this otherwise messages from iPhone users may never arrive. While the SIM card is still in your iPhone, open Settings then Messages and make sure iMessage is set to Off.

Photos

If you haven't backed up your iPhone photos to a PC or Mac, you should install the Google Photos app on your iPhone to upload them to the cloud, where they can be accessed on your new Android device. From Google Photos for iOS, select the menu button, then tap the settings cog and select 'Backup and sync'. Next, switch on 'Backup & sync' and you can sit back as your photos are uploaded to the cloud (be warned that this could take some time!). When you log into your Android device with your Google account, Photos will



automatically contain a timeline of your iPhone photos.

Music

Because iTunes isn't available from the Google Play store, you'll have to transfer your iTunes library if you want to listen to the tracks on an Android phone. This entails uploading the iTunes files to Google Play Music. To do this, make sure that your iPhone is fully synced to your computer using iTunes, then install Google Play Music Manager (bit.ly/playmusic415) and follow its on-screen instructions to upload your music to the cloud. You can sync up to 50,000 songs to the cloud for free and, once you've done so, you can play them from any web browser as well as Android and iOS devices. Note that in order to access your tracks, you might first need to add your credit card details to your Google account.



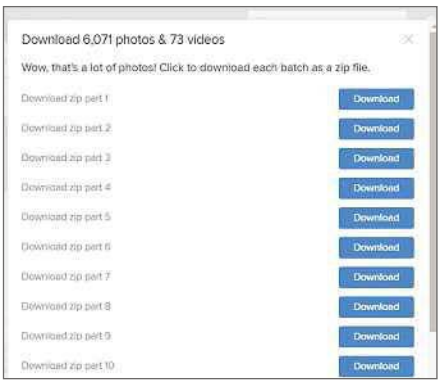
MOVE FROM YAHOO MAIL TO GMAIL

Following several major data breaches in 2016 and the recent news that Yahoo might cease to exist altogether (after it was acquired by US telecom giant Verizon), there's never been a better time to switch email provider. To import your Yahoo emails into Gmail, open Settings in Gmail and go to the 'Accounts and Import' tab, then click 'Import mail and contacts'. Enter your Yahoo Mail address under 'What account do you want to import from?', click Continue and enter your password, then select Continue again. Make sure 'Import contacts' and 'Import mail' are both selected, along with 'Import new mail for next 30 days' if you want Yahoo messages to automatically appear in your Gmail inbox for the next month. You can also select 'Add label to all imported mail' if you want your Yahoo emails to be easily identifiable and sortable. Finally, click 'Start import', then OK.



COPY PHOTOS FROM FLICKR TO PHOTOS

With Yahoo's future so uncertain, it's a good idea to move your photos from Flickr to Google Photos rather than risk losing them. To do this, you'll first need to manually download your image files from Flickr. Open the site's Camera Roll view, select the first image, then press and hold Shift while scrolling down to the last entry. Click this while still holding down the Shift key and Flickr will display the total number of images you've selected. Click Download and the site will ask you to download your images as multiple archive files. Download and extract each one, then install the Google Photos Desktop uploader (photos.google.com/apps) and follow its step-by-step instructions to upload all your photos to the cloud. Note that the free version of Photos is limited to 15GB of storage at full quality, but you can save an unlimited number of files by choosing the 'High quality' option.

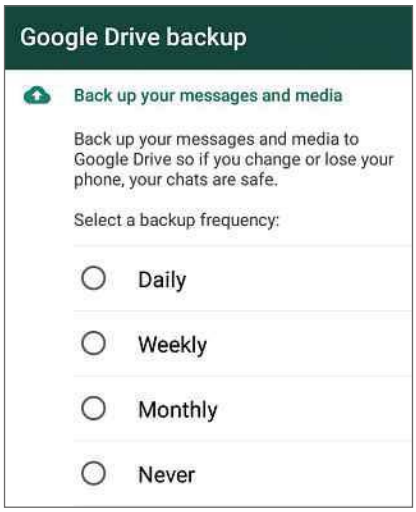


TRANSFER WHATSAPP CHATS TO A NEW PHONE

If you're moving from one iPhone to another phone, you'll need to back up your WhatsApp chats to iCloud so that they can be restored to your new device. To do this, open WhatsApp Settings, select Chats, Chat Backup and Backup Now. You can also tap Auto Backup from this menu to set the app to back up your chats at regular intervals. After checking when the last backup was performed, you can delete the app. When you install it on your new phone and follow the on-screen instructions, you'll be given the option to restore your chats.

The process for transferring chats between Android devices is very similar. Open WhatsApp's Settings, select Chats, 'Chat backup' and 'Back up to Google Drive'. Choose how often you want backups to take place, then tap Back Up. You'll be asked to select the Google account to which you want to save your backup. Once it's finished, you can delete the app. When installing WhatsApp on your new Android device, you'll be asked if you want to restore your chats when you verify your phone number.

We'd advise against trying to move your chats from iOS to Android (and the reverse), because the process is long-winded and involves using third-party apps that might not respect your privacy. You can still keep copies of your important chats and the photos they contain by emailing them to yourself. To do this, open the WhatsApp conversation you want to email, tap the contact's name and scroll down to tap Export Chat. Choose whether you want to include media such as photos and videos from the conversation, then select the Mail app, enter your email address and tap Send.



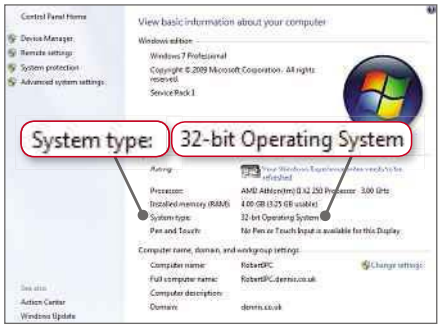
Will it work or NOT?



Don't waste time trying to install incompatible software. **Robert Irvine** explains how to make sure files will open before you download and run them

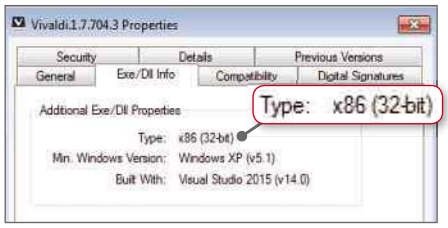
Find out whether software is 32-bit or 64-bit

Most 32-bit (x86) software will work on any version of Windows, but you'll need a 64-bit edition of the operating system (and a 64-bit processor) to run 64-bit (x64) software. If you're not sure how many bits you're working with, go to the Start menu and search for `system`. Select the result to open the System section of the Control Panel and you'll find details of your bits next to 'System type'.



The tough economic climate has left us running 32-bit Windows 7

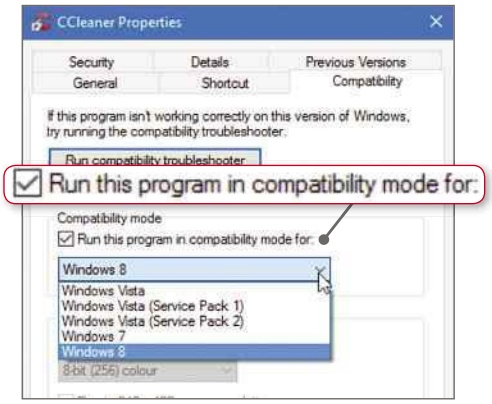
Knowing this information ensures that you click the correct download link, but if you're not given a choice between 32-bit and 64-bit – or you've already downloaded the software – your install may hit a brick wall. Help is at hand from a free tool called ExeProperties (bit.ly/exeprop415), which tells you if a program is incompatible with your PC *before* you open it. Simply right-click the EXE or DLL file of a download, select Properties and click the Exe/Dll Info tab. Here, you'll see which system type the software requires and the minimum Windows version. If it's a 64-bit program and you only have 32-bit, then it's time to give up.



We can happily install this program because it's 32-bit. Hooray!

Run old software in compatibility mode

When Windows 10 was released, many users had trouble running their favourite programs in the new operating system, despite its claim to be 'backwards-compatible'. Microsoft has since fixed most of the problems, but you may still find that some software you used on Windows 7 or earlier no longer works.



Turn back time in Windows 10 to when life seemed trouble-free

RUN CHROME EXTENSIONS IN FIREFOX

By the end of 2017, Mozilla plans to completely replace traditional Firefox add-ons with WebExtensions that work across all browsers. Until then, you can make your favourite Chrome extensions work in Firefox using a fantastic new tool called Chrome Store Foxified (bit.ly/foxified415). Install this add-on, then visit the Chrome Web Store (chrome.google.com/webstore) in Firefox, choose an extension and you'll see an 'Add to Firefox' button in the top-right corner. Click this and the extension will convert to Firefox format, and you'll be able to 'sign' and install it or download the CRX file to your PC. You'll first need to create an account at addons.mozilla.org, if you don't already have one, but this doesn't take long. Alternatively, you can run the extension temporarily (until you close Firefox) by clicking Temporarily Install Unsigned Addon. Not all Chrome extensions work properly in Firefox, but thousands do!



Make your favourite Chrome extensions work in Firefox

Ideally, Windows 10 should automatically switch to 'compatibility mode' when it detects that you're trying to run an old program, but you can also activate this manually. Right-click the application's EXE file or shortcut, select Properties and click the Compatibility tab, then tick 'Run this program in compatibility mode for:' and choose the version of Windows that the program worked properly on. If you're not sure what the problem is, run the 'compatibility troubleshooter' to select the correct settings.



Uber races ahead with Nougat while other apps lag behind

Check the compatibility of Android apps

Google helpfully tells you if an app in the Play store will work on your phone or tablet, but if you have more than one Android device it may say: "This app is compatible with some of your devices". Click the 'i' icon next to this message to find out which one(s) it will work with. Incompatibility may be caused by an older version of Android, because the app requires a mobile network or due to geographical restrictions (although if



It's not your fault that WhatsApp doesn't work on your tablet

the latter is the reason then the app won't work on any of your devices).

Before you upgrade to a new version of Android, such as Marshmallow or Nougat, it's worth checking that your favourite apps are compatible with the new mobile OS. You can do this using a new free tool called AppChecker (bit.ly/checker415), which reveals the version of Android your apps were designed to work with. If an app was intended to run in Jelly Bean or Ice Cream Sandwich, that doesn't necessarily mean it will stop working after you upgrade, but it might become clunky and not support Android's latest capabilities. These problems could be fixed by updating the app or finding a more modern replacement. If, on the other hand, your most-used apps support a version of Android higher than the one you're running, it's time to embrace the future!

Report incompatible Firefox add-ons

Any extension you install from the official Chrome Web Store should update automatically alongside the browser, which prevents compatibility problems and removes troublesome tools by disabling them. Firefox is less efficient and many older add-ons don't work in the latest version of the browser. Mozilla usually highlights this on the add-on's download page or warns you when you try to install it, and offers help through its Add-on Compatibility Reporter (bit.ly/reporter415). This lists the add-ons you have enabled and lets you mark them as working okay or as experiencing "issues". You can then submit a report to Mozilla, which will ask developers to fix the problems.



Tell Mozilla that an add-on isn't working to get it fixed pronto

Find the right program to open a file

When you double-click a file with an unusual extension, Windows asks you to choose a program to open it with. To minimise the guesswork when you try to open an unknown file, the excellent free tool OpenWith Enhanced (bit.ly/open415) checks its online database to suggest applications that have opened that type of file before. Programs that are already installed on your computer are marked accordingly, so you'll know which ones you have access to, and if you select an application that's not installed on your computer, you'll be redirected to its official website to download it. Once you've chosen the correct software, select 'Always use the selected program to open this kind of file' to prevent future problems.



OpenWith Enhanced opens the files that Windows can't reach

You can solve the mystery behind an unknown file type by looking it up on FileInfo.com (www.fileinfo.com). This massive database of file extensions provides detailed information about specific file types, including what data they contain and all the programs that can be used to open them. The site covers more than 10,000 extensions, from AAC (Advanced Audio Coding File) to ZZZ (a black-and-white game file, apparently), and includes a weekly chart of the most searched-for file types. FileInfo.com also has a Chrome extension, called File Extension Search (bit.ly/file415), which lets you identify a file's format *before* you download it, so you know which program you'll need to open it. ■



Avoid frustration by identifying file types before you download them

Broadband Deals

Call FREE on 0800 083 2357 to switch your broadband

	Provider	Package name	Monthly price	Contract length	Broadband speed	Allowance	First-year cost*
1	sky	Sky: Broadband	£27.40 (£17.40 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	CHEAPEST £208.80
2	EE	EE: Broadband	£28.50 (£19.50 for 18 months)	18 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited *	£234.00
3	TalkTalk For Everyone	TalkTalk: Broadband	£25.50 (£20.00 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£240.00
4	Virgin media	Virgin: Broadband	£45.00 (£29.00 for 12 months)	12 months	50Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited *	£348.00

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
* Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.

Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 10 January 2017.

Ofcom

Broadband Genie's helpline is powered by Simplify Digital, the Ofcom-accredited switching service

In the next issue of our sister title Computeractive...

SNEAK PREVIEW!

Computer active

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Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your computer by taking our fortnightly challenges. Can you unravel our phone-themed word search and guess our film-title emoji?

WEB USER WORD SEARCH

Can you find the following phones in the grid on the right? Names may appear vertically, horizontally or diagonally, and forwards or backwards

APPLE IPHONE
GOOGLE PIXEL
HTC ONE
HUAWEI MATE
MOTO X PLAY
ONEPLUS THREE
SAMSUNG GALAXY
SONY XPERIA
VODAFONE SMART
WILEYFOX SWIFT

T	S	Y	Z	G	V	Y	F	V	L	E	E	L
F	R	X	G	X	A	F	B	C	T	P	E	E
I	P	A	X	Y	P	A	M	A	M	W	R	X
W	P	L	M	Z	P	L	M	T	O	S	H	I
S	H	A	V	S	L	I	F	Y	T	D	T	P
X	S	G	K	Y	E	T	H	L	O	R	S	E
O	F	G	H	W	I	N	T	E	X	K	U	L
F	R	N	A	V	P	M	O	M	P	X	L	G
Y	A	U	O	K	H	X	Z	F	L	Y	P	O
E	H	S	E	N	O	C	T	H	A	S	E	O
L	V	M	Y	F	N	R	Q	L	Y	D	N	G
I	Z	A	Q	G	E	K	Y	M	T	D	O	J
W	P	S	O	N	Y	X	P	E	R	I	A	V

CAN YOU GUESS THE FILM TITLES FROM THE EMOJI?

1 

2 

3 

4 

Get the answers online at bit.ly/quiz415

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 5
TP-LINK RE450 Wi-Fi extender

WORTH £44.99 EACH



TP-LINK's RE450 Wi-Fi dual-band extender won *Web User*'s Group Test in Issue 414. It gave us fantastic speeds throughout our test house, maintaining a consistent signal when other extenders failed. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'RE450' in the subject line. For more information, visit uk.tp-link.com, follow @tplinkuk on Twitter, and 'like' www.facebook.com/TPLINKUK.

WIN 1 OF 3
KitSound Boom DAB Wireless Radios

WORTH £99.99 EACH



KitSound's Boom DAB Wireless Radio is powered by 20 Watts to ensure that every song sounds clear and rich. It connects to your phone or tablet using Bluetooth, and there's also a USB charging output so you don't have to worry about your device running out of power. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'boom' in the subject line. For more information, visit www.kitsound.co.uk and follow @KitSoundUK on Twitter.

Organise your Desktop with SideSlide | bit.ly/side415

SideSlide is a Desktop sidebar and program launcher that was recently updated. Here's how to use it to keep your Desktop neat and tidy

If your Desktop is littered with files, folders, program shortcuts and more, SideSlide can help you whip it into shape. This floating workspace will sit anywhere on your screen or hide at the edge until you need it – just hover your mouse over it, and it appears instantly. Use it to store program shortcuts, folders, files, bookmarks, news feeds, notes and reminders – all of which are sorted neatly into individual resizable windows. The latest version gains a calendar, which you summon by pressing the '=' key, and the ability to back up your current layout and preferences. There's also a new 'copy path' option.

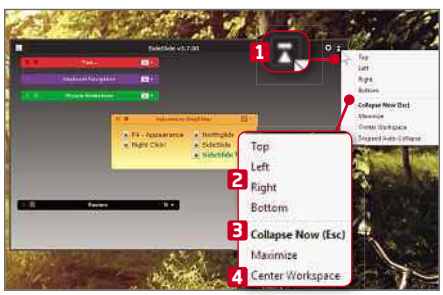
The default design isn't particularly attractive, but the software offers a range of alternative themes, so you can customise the way it looks and behaves.



1 When you launch SideSlide, a number of windows appear on your Desktop. These include some Post-It style notes, one of which is a welcome message, 1 and the SideSlide workspace. 2 Drag the Note containing the message to the Desktop, then click the up arrow in its corner 3 to return it to the workspace.



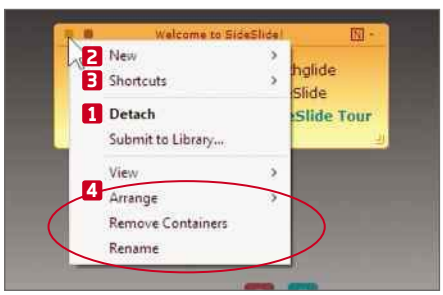
2 You can move any window in or out of the workspace in this way. You can also move the workspace anywhere on your screen by clicking and dragging its title bar. 1 To resize the workspace, move your cursor to the corner or edge of the window until the handles appear, 2 then click and drag to the desired size.



3 If you want to use SideSlide as a sidebar, right-click the button in the top-right corner of the workspace 1 and choose your preferred position from the menu that appears. 2 From here, you can also collapse the workspace to keep it out of the way 3 or centre it on your Desktop. 4

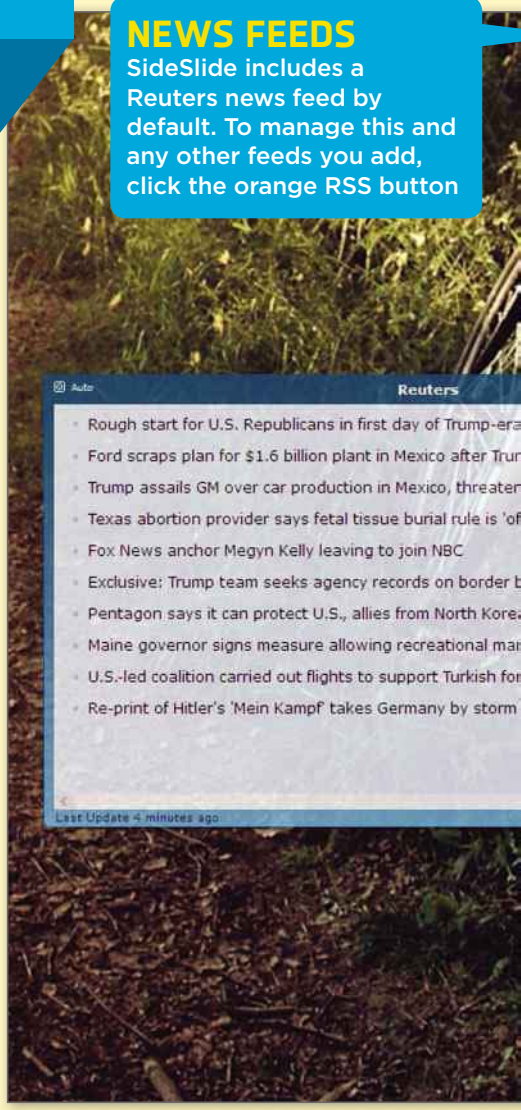


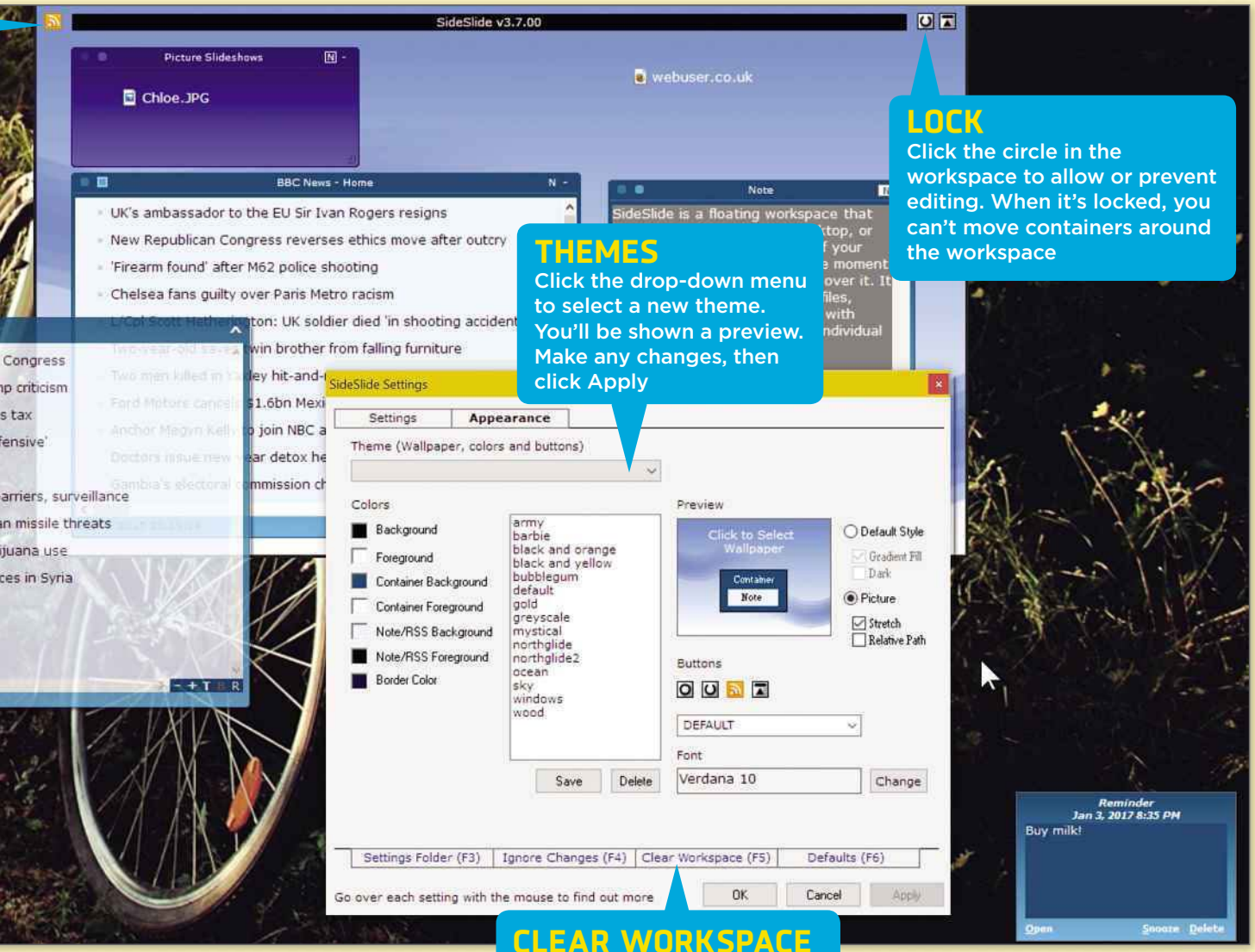
4 When the workspace is hidden, moving your mouse to its location makes it reappear. Double-click the header to open the workspace full screen. You can move containers into the workspace by clicking and dragging, and shrink or expand them by clicking the small square in the top-left. 1



5 Right-click the window to open a menu with options to detach a container, 1 add new content 2 and manage shortcuts. 3 You can also arrange, remove and rename containers from this menu. 4 Use these options to reorganise the workspace to your liking.

NEWS FEEDS
SideSlide includes a Reuters news feed by default. To manage this and any other feeds you add, click the orange RSS button





LOCK

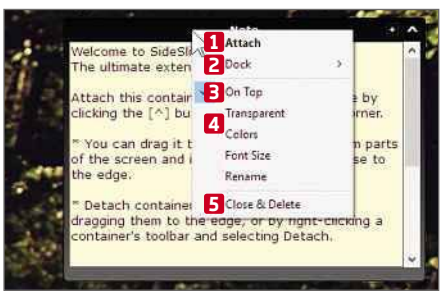
Click the circle in the workspace to allow or prevent editing. When it's locked, you can't move containers around the workspace

THEMES

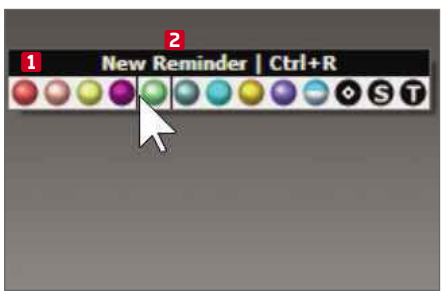
Click the drop-down menu to select a new theme. You'll be shown a preview. Make any changes, then click Apply

CLEAR WORKSPACE

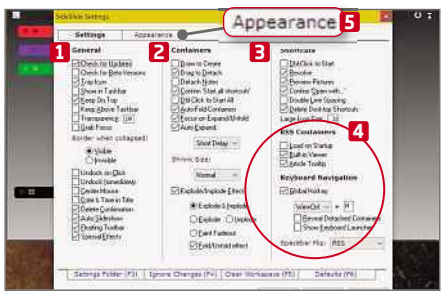
You can remove all the default containers and start from scratch by opening Settings and clicking Clear Workspace, or pressing F5



6 Notes have their own menu, which you access by right-clicking the menu bar. You can attach a note to the workspace, **1** dock it to the edge of the screen, **2** choose whether or not it's visible at all times, **3** make it transparent and change its colour. **4** You can also close and delete unwanted notes. **5**



7 To add your own containers, click a blank area of the workspace. A floating toolbar appears. **1** Hover your mouse over it to see what each button does, **2** and click one to create that item. Options include, new container, new folder container, notes, reminders and shortcuts.



8 To customise SideSlide's behaviour, right-click a blank area of the workspace and select Settings, or press F3. Here, you'll find general settings, **1** settings for containers **2** and shortcuts, **3** as well as options for RSS and keyboard navigation. **4** Change how the program looks in the Appearance tab. **5**

Back up changed files automatically

AOMEI Backupper 4.0: bit.ly/aomei415 | 10 mins | XP, Vista, 7, 8, 10

The latest version of AOMEI Backupper introduces an excellent new tool that lets you sync a group of files to another location – such as an external hard drive or cloud storage – so you can be sure you always have an up-to-date backup. Because the files are synced rather than stored as part of a backup image, you can view and open them with a minimum of fuss, even on a PC that doesn't have the backup software installed.

You can activate real-time syncing so that any changes you make to your source files are detected immediately and replicated in the destination folder. Alternatively, you can use manual scheduling to ensure your files are synced daily, weekly or monthly.

The option to sync to a cloud app is especially useful because it lets you keep your files where you want them while still backing up to a cloud service. Although we're using AOMEI Backupper Standard, which is the free version of premium software, it provides some great additional tools, including the option to switch off your PC after the initial lengthy sync and to send email reports about all your backups.

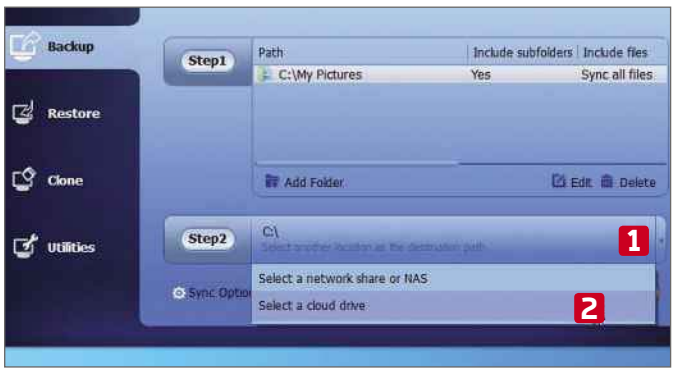




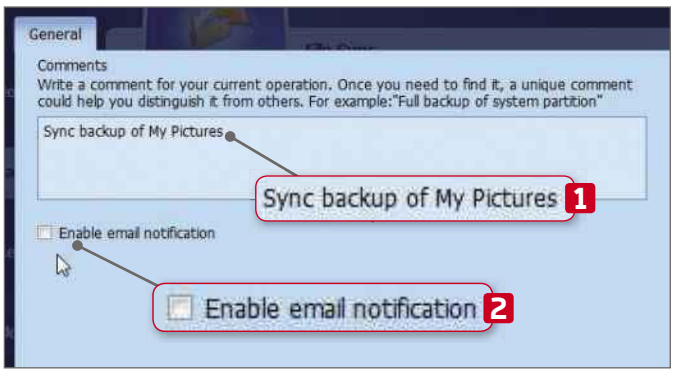
1 Download, install and run AOMEI Backupper. Next, click Backup 1 and scroll down to click File Sync. Choose a name for your backup 2 and, in the area marked 'Step 1', select Add Folder 3 and Browse to choose the folder you want to sync. Click Open to confirm your selection.



2 Choose whether you want to include subfolders, 1 then select OK. 2 You can repeat the process to add multiple folders. When you're happy with your selection, click 'Step 2' 3 to choose the local directory to which you want to sync your files. Click OK to confirm your selection.



3 If you want to sync your source folders to a cloud drive, click the drop-down menu, 1 choose the option to 'Select a cloud drive' 2 (the network share option is a premium feature) and select the service you want to sync the files to from the left-hand column, then click OK.



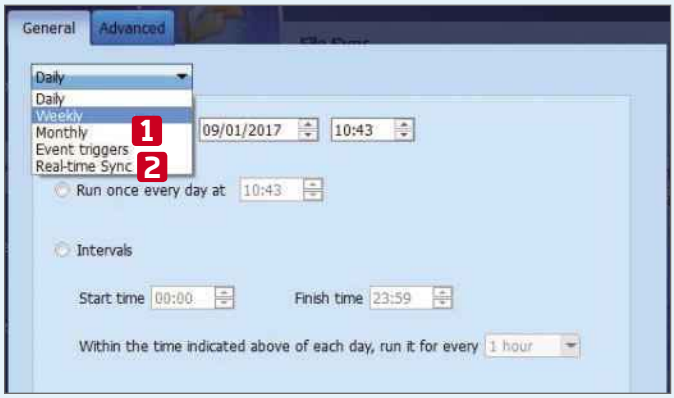
4 Click Sync Options to add a description 1 that will help you identify your backup. In this menu, you'll also see an option to 'Enable email notification'. 2 Select this if you want to receive email confirmation of your backups (open Settings and Notifications to configure this). Click OK to save.



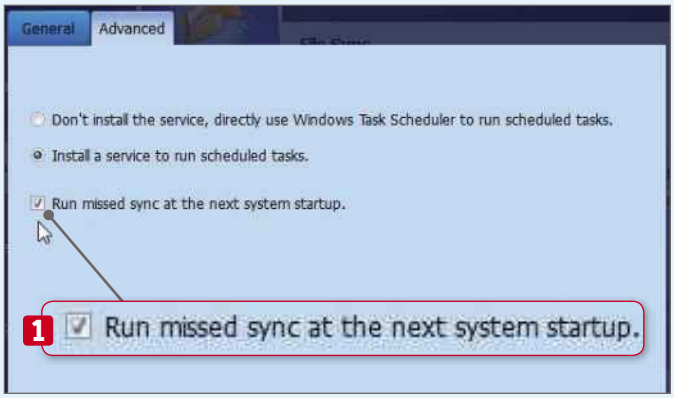
EXPERT TIP

Edward Munn says

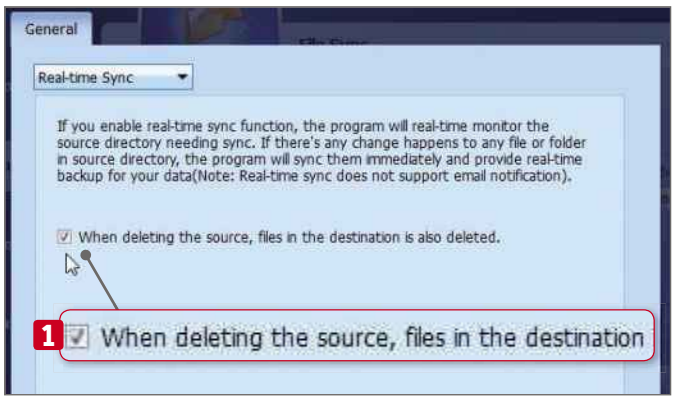
As with most backup tools, AOMEI Backupper's File Sync feature is one-directional, so every change you make to the source files is reflected in the target folder, but if you make any alterations to files in the target folder, they won't be synced back to the source files. To avoid confusion, therefore, we recommend that you view but don't edit files in the target folder.



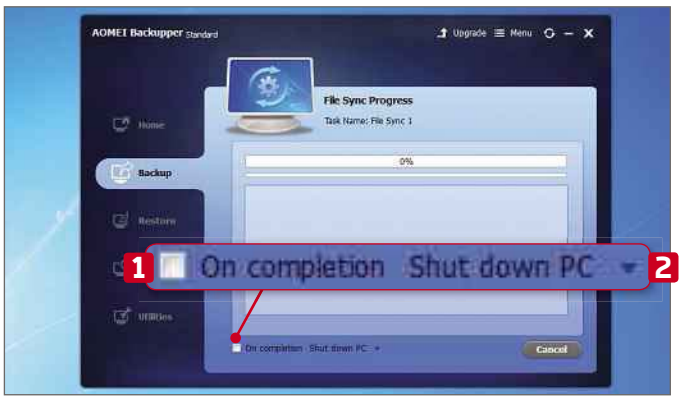
5 Tick the Schedule box and click the button to choose how often your files are synced. You can choose from a range of options including Daily, Weekly and Monthly, 1 as well as Real-time Sync. 2 'Event triggers' is a premium option and not available in the Standard version.



6 You can use the daily, weekly and monthly options to specify exactly when AOMEI syncs your files. By clicking the Advanced tab, you can also choose to 'Run missed sync at the next system startup' 1 to ensure you always have an up-to-date backup.



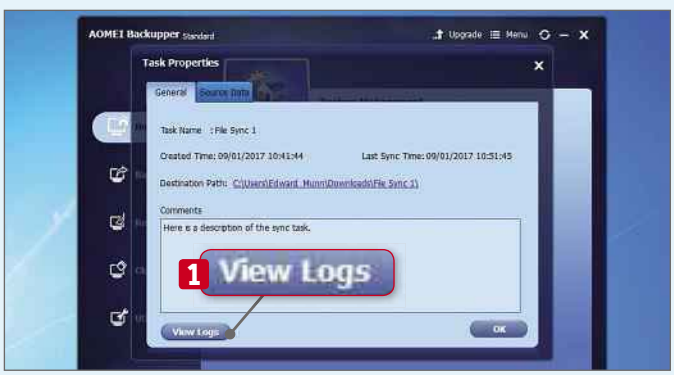
7 If you select Real-time Sync, AOMEI Backupper is set to delete files in the destination folder by default when they're deleted from the source. Untick this option 1 if you would prefer the program to keep copies of your synced files even if you delete the originals.



8 When you're happy with your configuration, click Start Sync and AOMEI Backupper will back up your files. If you have a lot of files and your sync is likely to take a long time, tick the 'On completion' box 1 and choose what happens when the backup has finished, such as 'Shut down PC'. 2



9 AOMEI's Home tab shows a summary of all your backups. 1 Click Restore 2 to restore a backup or Sync Now 3 to perform a manual sync. Click Advanced 4 and select Schedule Sync to change how often a backup is synced, or Edit Sync 5 to change the source and destination directories.

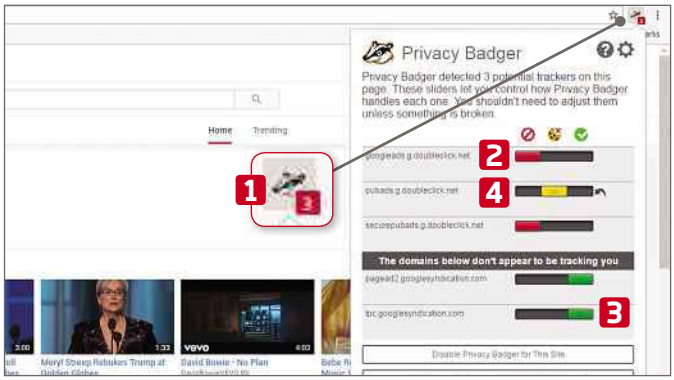


10 Click Properties to see the description of a backup (which you entered in Step 4), along with information about when it was first created. Select View Logs 1 from this menu to view its sync history. You can also click the Source Data tab to view and open the source files.

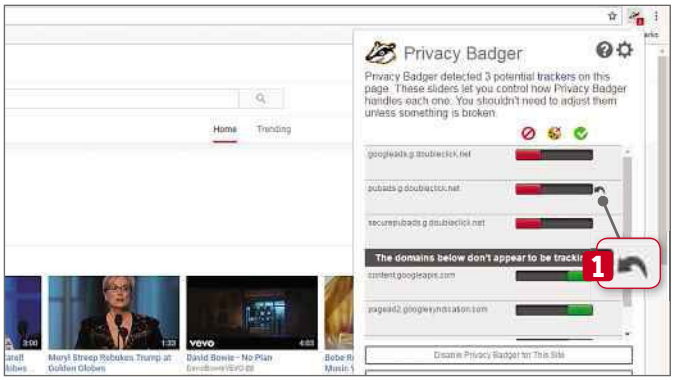
Stop hidden trackers following you around the web

Web trackers observe your movements around the web in the hope of showing you tempting (or invasive and annoying) ads based on the sites you've visited. The new version of Privacy Badger blocks these trackers – just as the previous version did – but it also adds some useful new tools that make its protection even more effective.

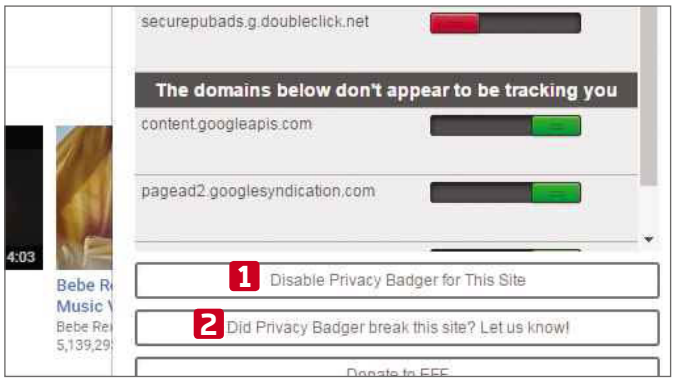
Privacy Badger 2.0: bit.ly/badger415 | 10 mins |



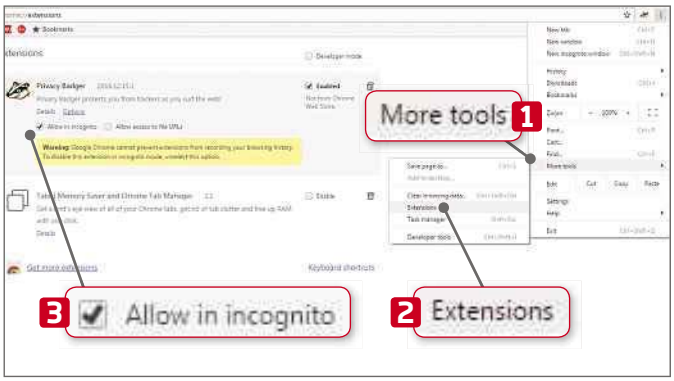
1 Privacy Badger starts protecting you automatically. Click its button 1 to display a panel, which lists any tracking tools it detects with a slider: red 2 shows the tool is being blocked, green 3 means the tracker is deemed to be safe, while yellow 4 is partially blocked to ensure the site still works.



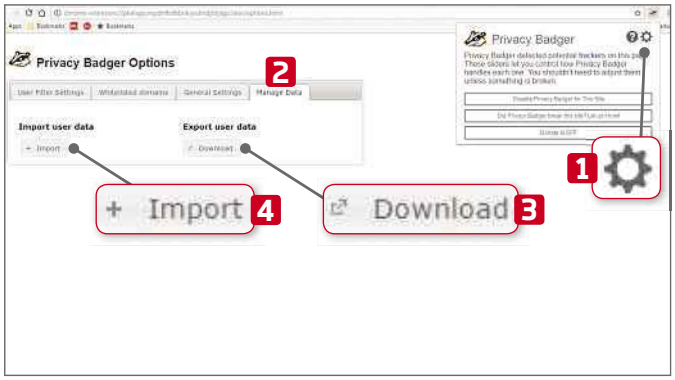
2 You can drag the sliders to any setting you want, but you may find that this occasionally stops a site from working properly. If this happens, click the arrow next to any sliders you've changed 1 to revert to Privacy Badger's defaults.



3 If Privacy Badger's settings are preventing a site from operating, you can circumvent it completely by clicking the 'Disable Privacy Badger for This Site' button. 1 You can also click 'Did Privacy Badger break this site' 2 to send information back to the developers.



4 In the latest version, Privacy Badger can be set to operate in incognito mode, but this isn't switched on by default. In Chrome, click the menu button, select 'More tools' 1 then Extensions 2 and put a tick in the box next to 'Allow in incognito'. 3



5 The software learns as you browse and saves the data locally, but you can now transfer your settings to another browser. Click the Options cog, 1 select the Manage Data tab 2 and use the Download button 3 to save the data, then click the Import button 4 to upload it to another browser.



6 You'll also find a new WebRTC setting 1 under the General Settings tab, 2 which gives you the option to stop information about your IP address leaking when making video and audio calls. Tick it, but be aware that it might slow down certain tools, such as Google Hangouts.

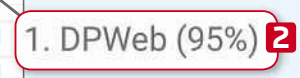
Connect your Android device to the best network

Wi-Fi Prioritizer lets you automatically connect to your favourite Wi-Fi networks so your device never joins the wrong one. The handy tool then checks for preferred networks at regular intervals and switches to the highest priority network if its signal strength is strong enough. It can also be set to ignore networks that aren't connecting to the internet.

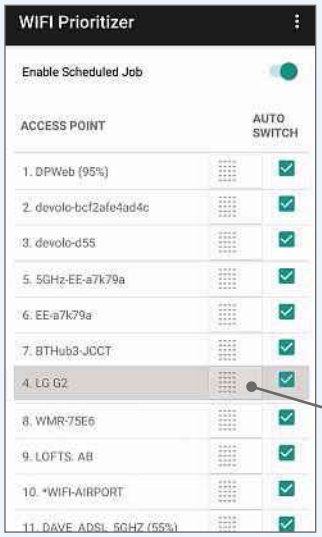


Wi-Fi Prioritizer: bit.ly/wifi415 | 10 mins | 4.1+

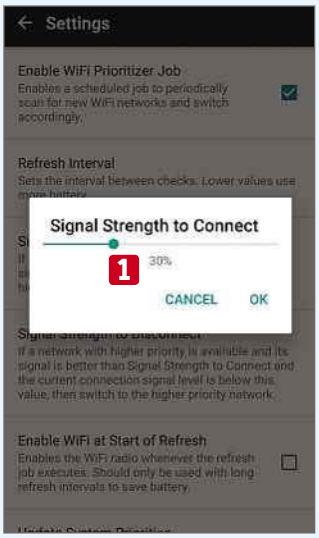




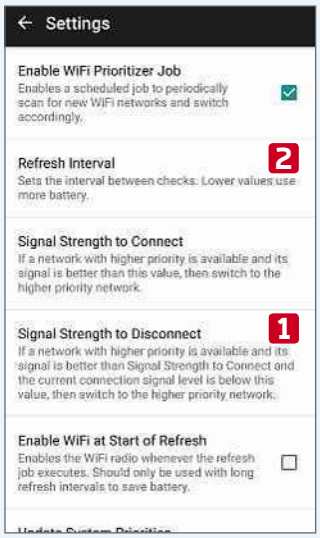
1 Make sure Wi-Fi is turned on and open Wi-Fi Prioritizer. The app shows all your saved Wi-Fi networks with the current network listed at the top. 1 Networks that are in range display a signal-strength percentage after their name. 2



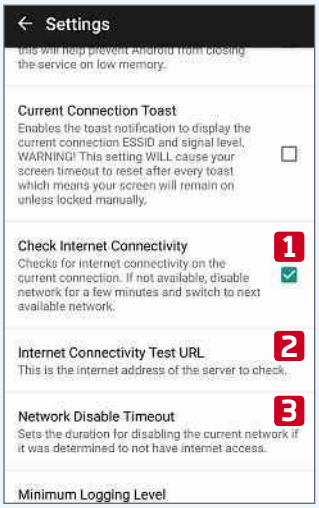
2 To change a network's priority, press and drag its slider button 1 to drag it up or down the list. By default, WiFi Prioritizer will automatically switch to higher priority networks when they're in range and have signal strength of 30% or more if your current network has less than 100% signal strength.



3 You can stop the app auto-switching to a specific network by unticking the appropriate box. You can also set the minimum signal strength 1 at which Wi-Fi Prioritizer will join available, higher-priority networks. To do this, tap the menu button, open Settings and choose 'Signal Strength to Connect'.



4 To make sure that WiFi Prioritizer only picks another network when your current one has low signal strength, use the 'Signal Strength to Disconnect' option in the Settings menu. 1 You can also choose how often WiFi Prioritizer scans for Wi-Fi networks by using the Refresh Interval option. 2



5 To stop your device connecting to Wi-Fi networks that offer no internet connectivity, tick the box next to Check Internet Connectivity. 1 You can choose which URL the app uses to check connectivity 2 and set the duration for which it disables networks with no internet. 3



6 Wi-Fi Prioritizer refreshes even when Wi-Fi isn't enabled so that you can pick the best Wi-Fi network when it's eventually switched on. To stop the app using too much battery with this constant refreshing, choose longer refresh intervals or disable it using the switch to Enable Scheduled Job. 1

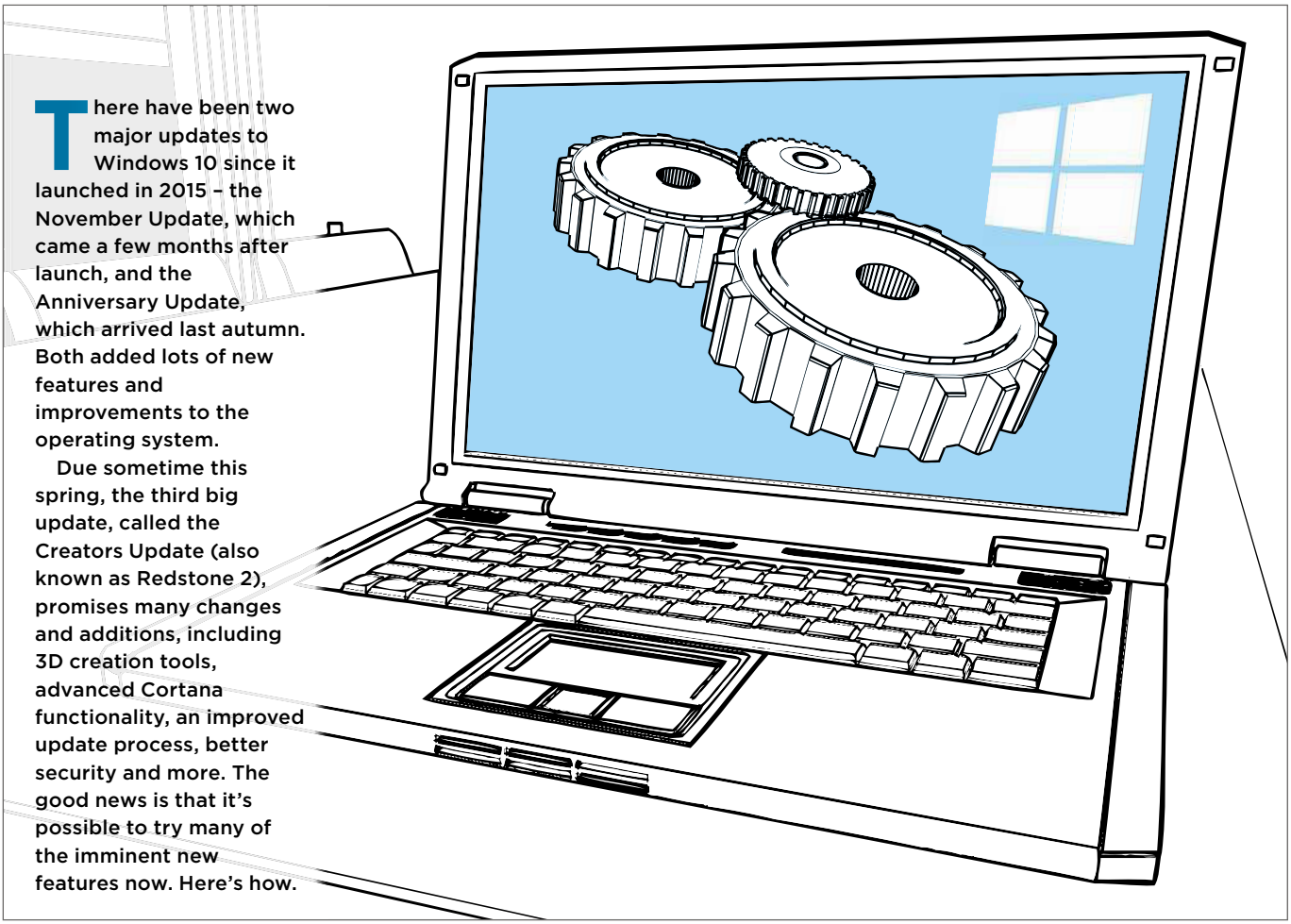
Weekend Project

Get to grips with some serious PC DIY to boost your computer's performance

How to...

Get Windows 10 Creators Update now

Wayne Williams shows you how to take Windows 10 Creators Update for an early test drive and what to try when you've got it



There have been two major updates to Windows 10 since it launched in 2015 – the November Update, which came a few months after launch, and the Anniversary Update, which arrived last autumn. Both added lots of new features and improvements to the operating system.

Due sometime this spring, the third big update, called the Creators Update (also known as Redstone 2), promises many changes and additions, including 3D creation tools, advanced Cortana functionality, an improved update process, better security and more. The good news is that it's possible to try many of the imminent new features now. Here's how.

Before you start

The Creators Update isn't finished yet – there's still months of development to go – but Windows Insiders have been trying out its new tools for a while. Build 14986 is one of the most recent releases and has been pushed out to the Insider Preview Slow ring, meaning it's a lot less risky than the usual Fast-ring-only releases. More importantly, it's also been released as an ISO image. This can be used to create a clean install of Windows 10 Creators Update on a spare PC or installed in a virtualized environment using VirtualBox (www.virtualbox.org). We'll show you how to download it in our Mini Workshop, opposite, and how to run it in VirtualBox in our Mini Workshop on page 61.

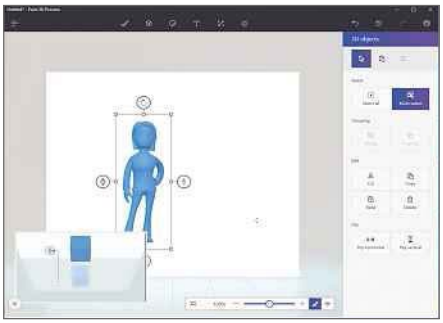
You can, if you prefer, install it on your main PC, but this isn't something we would recommend because it's still having bugs and problems ironed out. Also, if you change your mind about being on the Windows Insider programme and want to return to your previous (stable) version, you'll need to reinstall Windows from your original installation media.

What's new

The Creators Update has a lot of new features and improvements. Here are some of the standouts:

• New 3D software

Microsoft is betting large on 3D being the next big thing, and this is the primary focus of the Creators Update. There's a new Paint 3D app that lets you create and work with 3D models (you can scan objects in 3D using your smartphone), and the Edge browser now supports 3D content, too. PowerPoint comes with support for 3D models and the new OS gains a View 3D Preview app for viewing and interacting with 3D models.



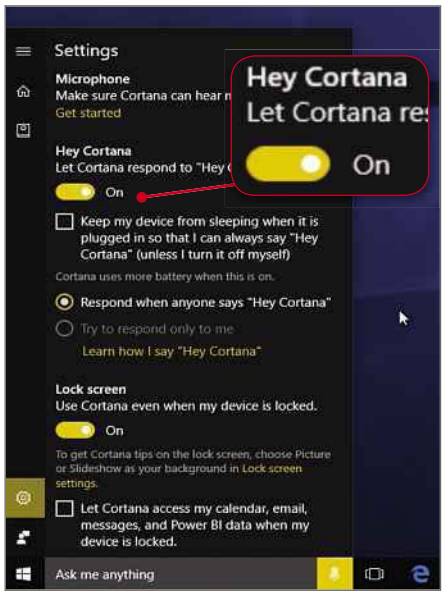
Paint 3D lets you create and manage 3D objects



Interact with 3D objects you've created or downloaded with View 3D Preview

• Cortana improvements

Microsoft has already made lots of tweaks to its digital assistant in previous updates and more are on the way. In the Creators Update, you can control your PC using your voice, including shutting down, restarting or locking Windows, and raising or lowering the volume. There's also a new full-screen mode. When your PC is unlocked and idle, say "Hey Cortana" and, after a few seconds (with no further input from you), Cortana will switch to a full-screen view so you can use it from across the room.



To see the full-screen version of Cortana, make sure 'Hey Cortana' is enabled

• Bye-bye Command Prompt

The Command Prompt (CMD) still exists but it's in the process of being replaced by PowerShell. You're unlikely to notice the difference but if you do – and you don't like it – you can (for now at least) go back to the original Command Prompt by clicking Start and going to Settings, Personalisation, Taskbar. Look for 'Replace Command Prompt with Windows PowerShell in the menu when I right-click the Start button or press Windows key+X' and change the setting to 'Off'.

Alternatively, take a look at our PowerShell tips in Issue 413 (bit.ly/webuser413) to get to grips with it.



The old Command Prompt has been replaced with PowerShell

• Unified Update Platform (UUP)

This is an under-the-bonnet change that alters the way Windows downloads updates. The operating system only has to fetch pieces that have changed since the last time, allowing for smaller and more efficient updates.

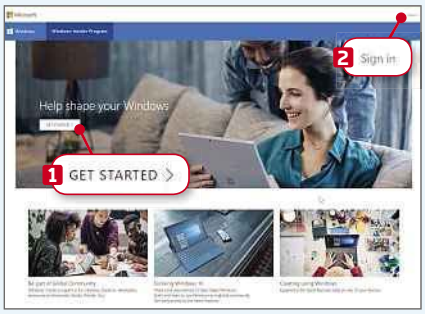
• Windows Ink improvements

If you use Windows Ink to sketch and draw on your PC, you might be interested in the new changes which improve the tool's look and functionality, and let you resume previous sketches.

• EPUB support

You can now read unprotected ebooks in EPUB format in Microsoft Edge. The browser lets you customise the reading

MINI WORKSHOP | Download Windows 10 Creators Update







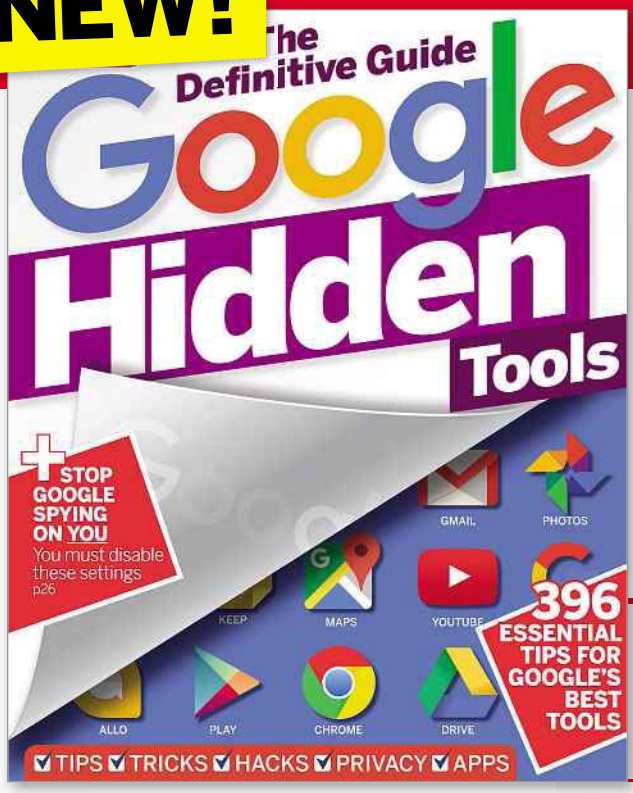
1 The ISO of Build 14986 is available to anyone participating in the Windows Insider Preview programme. If you're not currently signed up, go to insider.windows.com and click Get Started. 1 If you're already in the programme, you can just sign in. 2 It doesn't cost anything to join and you don't need to submit reports.

2 Once signed up and logged in, go to bit.ly/ipiso415 to grab the download. Select the edition you require from the drop-down box, which is Windows 10 Insider Preview – Build 14986 1 and click Confirm. 2 Wait a few seconds while the site validates your request, then select the product language 3 and click Confirm 4 for that, too.

3 Choose either a 32- or 64-bit download. 1 Both are quite sizable – the UK English 32-bit (x86) version is 3.2GB, while the 64-bit (x64) build is 4.4GB. If you want to install the ISO, you will need to burn the file to a DVD or transfer it to a USB memory stick using a tool such as Rufus (rufus.akeo.ie).

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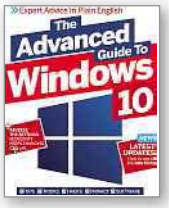


THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO GOOGLE HIDDEN TOOLS

In the new and updated Definitive Guide to Google Hidden Tools, the experts at *Web User* and *Computeractive* lift the lid on Google's most popular services to reveal more than 390 ways to make them even more efficient, useful and tailored to your needs. You'll find clever new add-ons for Chrome, smart hacks for YouTube and handy tools and tricks for Google Maps, Drive, Gmail and more. It's an essential guide to unlocking the hundreds of secret settings, options and tools that Google offers.

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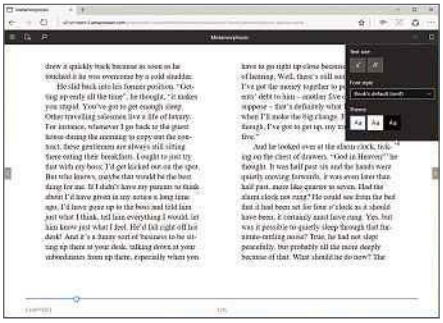
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THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO WINDOWS 10



This 148-page book is the perfect way to get started with Microsoft's fantastic operating system. You'll learn how to master all the new tools and software, and how to upgrade without losing anything. It has been updated to include fixes for problems that have appeared since Windows 10 launched.

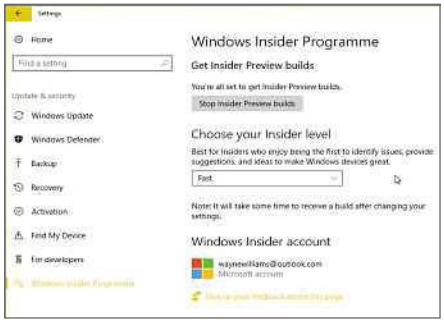
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You can view books in EPUB format, and customise the look of them



Windows Defender gets a brand-new look in the Creators Update



Switching to a different Insider ring can take around 24 hours to take effect

experience by changing the font, text size and theme – light, sepia or dark.

• Windows Defender

The security tool has been given a makeover so it now looks more like a Windows 10 app. Business users also gain additional threat protection.

• Bye-bye Flash

The Edge browser is following Chrome's example by "de-emphasising" Flash in favour of HTML5 and making it click-to-run (which means you need to click a button to allow Flash to run). For the time being, major sites that rely heavily on Flash will still work as they always have, but Microsoft plans to reduce the number of these exceptions over time.

• Improved Photos App

If you have a touchscreen device, you can use a finger or stylus to draw on photos or videos.

• Game broadcasting

This is only of interest to gamers who also own an Xbox One, but if that's you, then you might be excited to know you can now stream your gameplay to Xbox Live in real time.

• Wi-Fi Control

If you disable Wi-Fi in Windows 10, you can set it to automatically turn back on after a set number of hours.

Coming up next

New builds are released to the Windows Insider programme on a regular – typically weekly – basis. Although the latest ISO is for Build 14986, newer builds have since rolled out, introducing yet more forthcoming features. These include the ability to pause Windows updates, Live Tile grouping and a new pinned tab feature in Microsoft Edge. There's also an improved tab bar and a new Blue Light option to boost colour warmth, which makes the screen easier on the eyes and will be a welcome option for anyone who uses a computer at night.

Another new addition that only some unfortunate Windows Insiders will see is the GSOD (Green Screen of Death). This replaces the traditional blue-screen error message that most Windows users will be familiar with. Microsoft has changed the colour so it can instantly determine which branch (Stable or Insider) an error has occurred in.

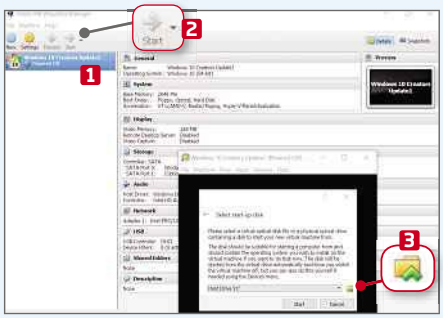
Change your ring

If you ran a clean Windows 10 installation from the ISO, you will have been automatically enrolled in the Slow ring. Updates for this come later than in the Fast ring, but tend to be less buggy. If you want to live life a little more dangerously and switch to the Fast ring, you can do so by going to Settings, 'Update & security' and clicking Windows Insider Programme on the left. ■

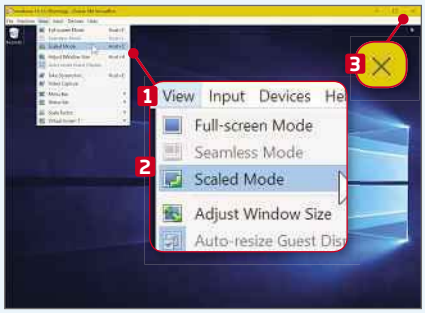
MINI WORKSHOP | Run Windows 10 Creators Update in VirtualBox



1 Run VirtualBox and click New in the Manager window. In the Create Virtual Machine box, enter 'Windows 10 Creators Update' 1 as the name of the OS. Select Windows 10 as the version (and use 'Windows 10 (64bit)' if you have a 64-bit ISO). 2 Click Next, 3 then set the Memory Size. The recommended figure should be fine.



2 Choose to 'Create a virtual hard disk now' and click Create. Accept VDI (VirtualBox Disk Image) as the drive type, create a fixed disk and select the default size. Click Create. When that's done, select the entry 1 and click the Start button. 2 In the window, click the folder icon 3 and navigate to the Windows 10 ISO.



3 Follow the steps to install Windows 10. Once that's done, you can start using it. To resize the program window, click View 1 in VirtualBox and select Full-screen or Scaled Mode. 2 To shut down Windows 10, click the X in the top-right corner 3 of VirtualBox and select 'Power off the machine'.

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Take control of your DNS

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Web User's Top Tips

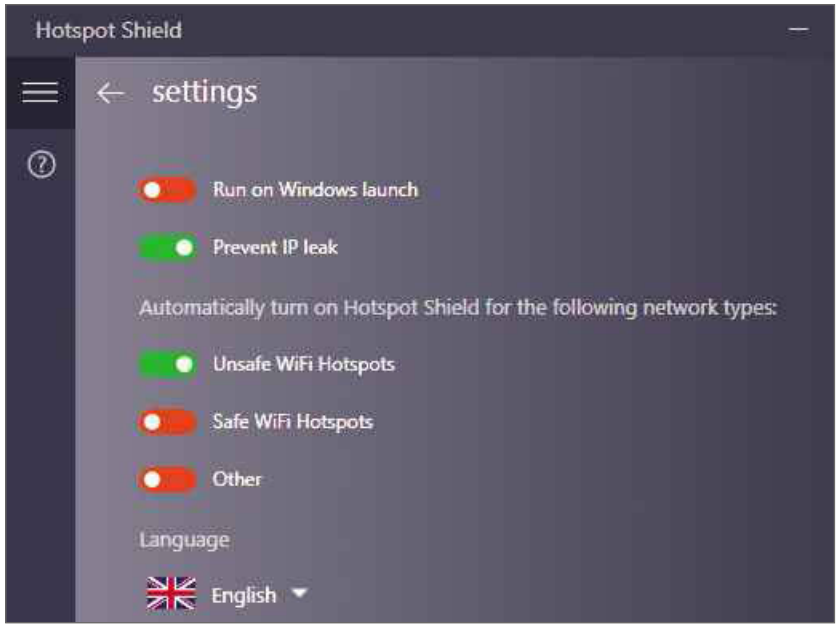
Our experts show how and when to use a VPN to increase security and privacy on the internet

TOP TIPS FOR USING VPNs

Use VPNs in public

Connecting to a public Wi-Fi hotspot on your laptop or phone carries risks, because the security may not be very good and it is possible that someone could snoop on your internet activity. A VPN (virtual private network) creates a secure and encrypted connection between you and the VPN server, bypassing anyone that might try to look at what you are doing, including the owner of the hotspot.

A VPN is especially useful for online shopping, banking and anything that requires you to log in, because it adds a layer of almost uncrackable security. Some VPNs such as Hotspot Shield (www.hotspotshield.com) will detect when you are using an insecure public Wi-Fi hotspot and automatically switch on to secure it. A VPN can be manually enabled, too – just don't forget to switch it on!



You can set some VPNs to switch on automatically when you join a network that might not be safe

Free vs paid-for VPNs

You may be wondering why you would want to pay a monthly subscription for a VPN when you can get one for free. One reason is the number of servers you can connect to. Free VPNs provide a small number of servers, but subscribing increases this to dozens or hundreds (depending on the service), so you have the choice of appearing to be in more locations.

The amount of data you can download is restricted with free VPNs and subscribing greatly increases the allowance. With Avira Phantom VPN (bit.ly/phm415) you get 500MB per month for free or unlimited data if you subscribe. However, if you register the product, which is also free, your data limit is increased to 1GB per month.

There will be fewer people sharing a paid-for VPN server, so the performance will be better. CyberGhost (www.cyberghostvpn.com), for example, says its paid-for service is five times faster than the free version.

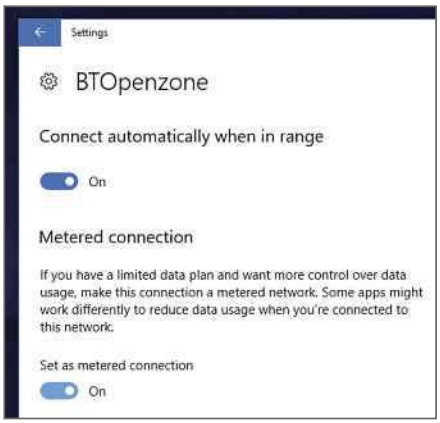
Some free VPNs show adverts, but paid-for services do not. If you install Hotspot Shield and ignore the request for payment, the service won't cost you anything but you'll have to put up with occasional adverts.

If you see words that `look like they've been typed in a typewriter`, follow the instructions and type them exactly as they appear, paying close attention to spaces and punctuation.

Turn off Windows Update

If you are using a free VPN, you will have to use the limited data allowance wisely. Windows Updates can be 1GB or more, which will use all of your data allowance, so you should switch them off while using the VPN to avoid wasting data.

In Windows 7, go to the Control Panel, Windows Update and click 'Change settings'. Select 'Never check for updates'. In Windows 10, press Windows+i and click 'Network & Internet'. Click the 'WiFi' heading, then 'Manage known networks' to see a list of Wi-Fi networks you connect to. Click ones where you use a VPN, click Properties and turn on the 'Metered connection' switch.



A metered connection prevents your data allowance being wasted on updates

This stops unnecessary internet activity such as large Windows updates from consuming your data allowance.

Increase the response speed

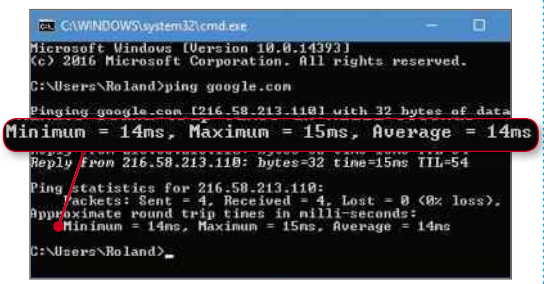
There's more to a fast internet connection than its download speed. Tweaking the latency and ping can speed things up and although the two terms are technically slightly different, you can treat them the same for the purposes of a VPN. Both latency and ping measure how fast a server on the internet responds when your PC connects to it.

Online gaming, for example, requires a fast internet connection, but your actual download speed might not be that critical whereas a responsive connection is essential for action games where a few milliseconds can make a difference. A player on a slow internet connection is an easy target for players on responsive connections.

Measure the response speed of the internet connection using the ping tool. Press Windows+R, type `cmd` then press Enter to open the Command Prompt. Type `ping` followed by the name of a server, such as `ping google.com`, then press Enter. Look at the last line, which shows the minimum, maximum and average time taken for the server to respond. Low figures indicate a responsive internet connection and are better for games and using other online applications that require a fast response.

Try this before connecting to a VPN, then repeat it again afterwards to see the difference the VPN makes. If it slows down, make a note of the difference.

VPNs provide a list of servers you can connect to and selecting one that is close to the server you want to use could reduce the latency and ping, making it more responsive. For example, if a game server is in the US, then connecting to a US VPN server might be more responsive, although this can also depend on the number of current users. Try various VPN servers close to the website or game server you want to access, ping them from the Command Prompt and use the fastest one.



Test the VPN's response speed with the Windows ping tool

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Encryption pros and cons

A VPN encrypts the internet connection, scrambling all the communications between you and the web servers you're connecting to, so anyone snooping on your data will see only garbled nonsense. The type of encryption affects the speed and security of the internet connection. NordVPN (nordvpn.com) encrypts the data twice, which increases the security but makes it slower than encrypting it once. This doesn't necessarily mean NordVPN is slower than other VPNs, but if a service offers a choice of encryption, simpler tends to be faster, but less secure.

VPNs for routers

Some routers can be configured to use a VPN. To set this up, log into the router's setup program, open a browser and enter the router's IP address, such as 192.168.1.1. If you aren't sure what the IP address is, press Windows+R, type `cmd` and press Enter. Type `ipconfig` and look for the Default Gateway. All routers are different, so we can't give exact details of how to set them up. PureVPN has guides for several routers at bit.ly/rou415.

The advantage of a router VPN is that every device in your home that connects to the internet – including computers, phones and tablets – will automatically be secured by the VPN. However, the processing power of a router is significantly less than that of a computer, so its internet performance won't be as good as a PC-based VPN. It's a question of convenience against speed.

Associate sites with VPN servers

ZenMate VPN is a Chrome extension available from the Chrome Web Store at bit.ly/zen415. It's free but you need to create an account to use it. ZenMate adds an icon to the browser's toolbar and clicking it opens a panel that lets you customise its settings. Click the middle icon halfway down and you can select the server location from a list. The options are limited with a free account but many more are available with the paid-for version.



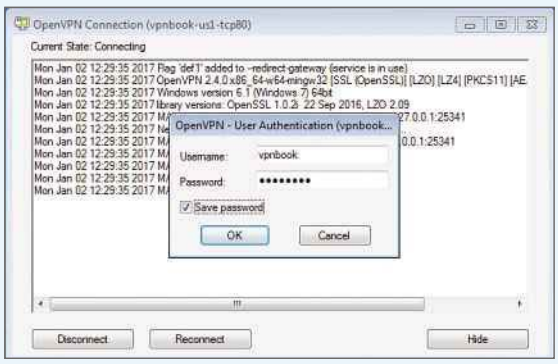
Associate a website with a specific VPN server using ZenMate VPN

ZenMate's most interesting tool lets you associate a website with a specific VPN server. When you type a URL into Chrome, ZenMate switches to the VPN server associated with it. This is handy if you want to use particular locations with specific websites. To set this up, visit the website and click the icon. Select the server to use with the site.

Free servers for free software

VPNBook (www.vpnbook.com) provides free VPN servers around the world and more experienced users should check it out. Go to the site and click Free OpenVPN Account or Free VPN. Click one of the Free OpenVPN links and a ZIP file downloads. Unzip it, then remember the username (vpnbook) and password at the bottom of the VPN server list.

Download the OpenVPN software from bit.ly/ovpn415 and install it. Run it and close the message that appears. Now right-click the OpenVPN icon in the taskbar and click Import. Select the files in the ZIP you downloaded from VPNBook, then right-click the icon again to connect to one of the VPNs you imported.



VPNBook provides free VPN servers, but is harder to set up than paid services

Ask the Expert

Roland Waddilove, computer programmer and PC journalist since 1981, answers all your technical questions. Email us for help at webuser@dennis.co.uk



BROWSERS

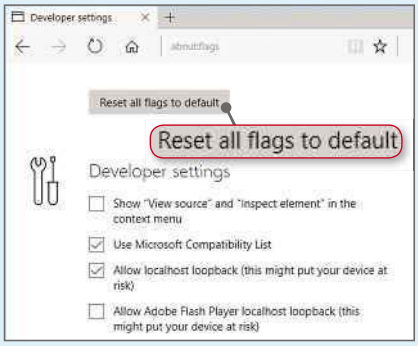
Reset Edge

Q I tried to speed up page-loading in Microsoft's Edge browser by typing `about:flags` into the address bar and ticking the Enable TCP Fast Open flag. Now, when I restart Edge, a blue screen appears with the error message 'Stopcode -> Driver IRQL not less or equal'. After a few seconds, the blue screen disappears and my PC reboots, but if I launch Edge again, the cycle repeats and I have no chance to open Edge, return to `about:flags` and click 'Reset all flags to default'.

The blue screen suggests that I visit windows.com/stopcode but when I do this in Internet Explorer, I am faced with over 400,000 possible links to explore! My operating system is up to date so I'd have thought my PC could handle the change to the flag.

George Caldwell, via email

A There is no simple way to reset Edge and undo the changes. One possible solution is to delete the Edge app by deleting the following folder:



Edge's about:flags hidden tools may not work on every PC

C:\Users\YourName\AppData\Local\Packages\Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe

Now right-click the Start button and select 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'.

To reinstall Edge, type:

```
Get-AppXPackage -AllUsers
-Name Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge
| Foreach {Add-AppxPackage
-DisableDevelopmentMode
-Register "$($_.
InstallLocation)\
AppXManifest.xml" -Verbose}
```

and press Enter. You can copy this text from bit.ly/edge415 and paste it into the PowerShell prompt.

GENERAL PC

Use Command Prompt as an Administrator

Q Following the first major update to Windows 10, I've had problems with updates and other minor issues. I tried to work through the solutions you gave to Mr Cull in Issue 412 (bit.ly/webuser412), but when I type `sfc /scannow` in Command Prompt, it says: "You must be an administrator running a console session in order to use the sfc utility."

My account details show I am listed as an administrator but in Command Prompt I am only a user. I don't understand this apparent discrepancy.

M Belshaw, via email



Even administrator accounts don't run software in admin mode by default

A A user who is an administrator can authorise programs to run with administrator privileges. However, this is only an option and, for security reasons, the default setting will still run programs in ordinary 'user mode'.

Go to the Start menu, scroll down to the bottom and expand Windows System. Right-click Command Prompt and select More, then select 'Run as administrator'. The screen clears and a message appears asking if you are sure you want to allow the app to make changes to your computer.

As an administrator, you can authorise it to do this, but not if you're an ordinary user. That is the difference between an administrator account and an ordinary user account.

GENERAL PC

Reset a lost Windows PIN

Q I recently received a text saying the PIN for my Microsoft Account had changed. A new code was provided but I've accidently lost the text. How do I get my PIN back?

Fred, via email

A The PIN is a convenient way to sign into Windows 10 and some Microsoft services. You can still sign in using a Microsoft ID, such as an outlook .com email address and password.

Your PIN can be changed or replaced with a new one. Press Windows+i to open the Settings app and select Accounts, then 'Sign-in options'. In the PIN section, you'll see two buttons and a link: Change, Remove and 'I forgot my PIN'. To change a PIN, you need to enter the old PIN and put in a new one; to remove it and create a new one, use the 'I forgot my PIN' link.



Change or remove the Microsoft login PIN by going to Accounts in Settings

GENERAL PC

Fix Windows 10 update

Q Since the Anniversary Update in August, my monthly Patch Tuesday updates have been causing problems. It can take up to six hours to update successfully. Even when it finally gets to "Configuring updates don't turn off your computer", the

message can go on indefinitely. This seems to be a common fault but I can't find a fix.

Paul Grant, via email

A First, check the hard drive. Open Explorer and select This PC in the left panel. Right-click the drive and select Properties. Select the Tools tab, then click the Check button. Scan the drive even if it says you don't need to.

Next, right-click the Start button and select Control Panel. Select 'Small icons' view and click Troubleshooting. Click 'View all' on the left, then click Windows Update and follow the steps.

Afterwards, right click the Start button and select Command Prompt (Admin). Type `sfc /scannow`, press Enter, and all Windows files will be checked and repaired if any are missing.

When it has finished, type `dism.exe /Online /Cleanup-image /Restorehealth` (with a space before each '/') and press Enter. This usually restores Windows 10 to full health.

HARDWARE
Restore missing DVD drive

Q I upgraded my son's old desktop PC to Windows 10 but now the DVD drive doesn't work. He downloads most of his software, so it's not a huge bother, but I'd like to get it working again.

Gary Thompson, via email

A This is not uncommon and there are different solutions you can try. For starters, right-click the Start button and select Device Manager. Expand 'DVD/CD-ROM drives', then right-click the drive and select Uninstall. Expand 'IDE ATA/ATAPI controllers', right-click the item below it and select Uninstall. Restart Windows to reinstall the Windows drivers.

Another solution is to press Windows+R, type `regedit` and press Enter to open the Registry Editor. Go to:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Services\atapi

Right-click 'atapi' and select New, then Key and name it `Controller0`. Right-click Controller0 and select New, then DWORD(32-bit) Value. Name it `EnumDevice1` and double-click it after creating it. Set the value to 1. Quit the Registry Editor and restart Windows.

GENERAL PC
Use UK English in Windows

Q I installed Windows 7 Pro 64-bit but when I type `colour` in the Start menu it displays the US spelling ('color') despite everything being set to English United Kingdom. How do I change this?

Jack Gold, via email



Configure regional settings for language, units, and other items in the Control Panel

A There are many configuration options relating to the language, keyboard, measurement units and other tools. You'll have to check them all and adjust them as necessary because if just one is wrong, it can cause problems.

Open the Control Panel and click 'Region and Language'. On the Formats tab, select 'English (United Kingdom)' for the format. Click 'Additional settings' and, in the next window, select the Currency tab. Set the currency to '£' and close the window. Select the Location tab and select United Kingdom. Click the 'Default location' link at the bottom, select United Kingdom and click Apply.

Return to 'Region and Language' and select the 'Keyboards and Languages' tab. Click 'Change keyboards' and select the 'English (United Kingdom)' keyboard. You may need to click the Add button and add the keyboard if it isn't there. Click OK to return to 'Keyboard and Language', and select the Administrative tab. Click 'Change system locale' and set it to 'English (United Kingdom)'.

SECURITY
Check the integrity of downloads

Q I want to download a version of Linux but it says I need to check it afterwards using a tool called Gpg4win. What is this and why do I need it? I've not used it with other versions of Linux.

Steve Moore, via email

A The Gpg4win (www.gpg4win.org) function used with the Linux download is probably checksum, which is a unique code representing a file's content. If even a tiny part of the file is changed in any way, the checksum produced will be different. So if a website posts the checksum for a file download, you can recreate the checksum after downloading it and compare it with the post. If they are the same you can be sure that you have an identical copy that has not corrupted or been tampered with by someone else.

SECURITY
Block trackers and other elements

Q Every time I run my security software, it finds malicious tracking cookies. Why does my security software not block them? And how dangerous are they? Not only is this malware present in my browser (even though it's regularly cleaned), it also appears when I use certain apps from the Windows Store, even Microsoft's own apps.

Chris Logan, via email

A Cookies are used by advertisers, websites and services to store information. This data can be used to find out which sites you visit and present ads based on your interests.

On a scale of 1 (absolutely fine) to 10 (totally evil), tracking cookies are a 1 or 2. They're not malicious but they are a privacy concern. Privacy extensions such as Ghostery (www.ghostery.com – or see our Workshop in Issue 409 at bit.ly/webuser409) can block tracking cookies by disabling browser features, but this may stop some websites working properly. Ghostery can also block ads, but you should be aware that many websites rely on ads for income. Apps – especially free apps – may use tracking cookies if they contain ads. But because they don't use a browser, privacy extensions won't block them.



Ghostery can block all sorts of unwanted elements from web pages



This fortnight Roland bought a £5 adapter to connect his Raspberry Pi to an old monitor – no more fighting for the TV

Your Top Tips

Our pick of the best advice from our readers. To get help or offer it to others, visit forum.webuser.co.uk



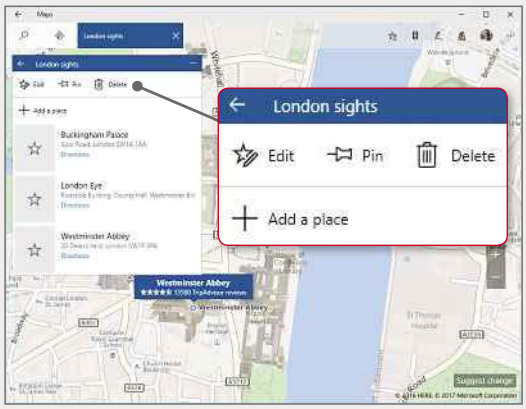
TOP TIP

Mug winner

MAPS

Map your favourite locations

If you have a Windows 10 tablet or hybrid device that you use on the go, you should check out the Windows 10 Maps app. It's recently added some great new tools, my favourite of which is Collections. You can store lots of places in a collection and I find it useful when planning trips, but you could use it for anything. Before you set off, use the Maps app to find places to visit and then store them as a collection.



Saving destinations to the Maps app before you go on a trip keeps them on hand while you're away

Click the Saved Places icon on the right side of the Maps window, then select Collections in the panel on the left. Click the plus symbol to create a new collection and name it, or select a collection to open it, clicking the plus sign to add places.

You can search for places, such as the London Eye or Buckingham Palace, or click a place on the map to add it to the collection. It's handy to refer to when you're on your trip.

Tom Kennedy, via email

HARDWARE

Improve SSD performance

Do you have a SanDisk solid-state drive? If so, you might want to install SanDisk SSD Dashboard (bit.ly/sandisk415). It helps you get the best performance from your SSD in Windows and includes tools to analyse the drive (displaying the model, capacity, firmware version and SMART attributes) and get firmware updates. It has a graphical interface that makes it very easy to use.



SanDisk SSD Dashboard tells you all the important info about your solid-state drive

I imagine that other drives probably have something similar, so if your SSD isn't made by SanDisk, it's worth finding out what's available from your own drive's manufacturer.

Doublell, Web User Forums

BROWSERS

Find whole words in web pages

In Issue 412 (bit.ly/webuser412), there was an item in Best New Browser Tools on page 31 about finding words that appear in web pages using Firefox's new 'Whole Word' option. This is great, but some people may not know that most browsers have their own versions of 'Find in page', which you can activate by pressing Ctrl+F. I've tried it out in Pale Moon, Opera, Vivaldi and IE 11, as well as in Firefox, and it works in all of them.

They all provide a method of jumping from one match to the next and an option to highlight the findings.

I hope that other browsers will follow Firefox's lead and eventually offer a 'Whole Word' option so you don't receive results that include your search term in a longer word.

Madeline, Web User Forums

BROWSERS

Translate multiple languages simultaneously

Smart Translate (bit.ly/translate415) is a handy free Chrome add-on that lets you translate from one language to three other languages simultaneously. The add-on can also be installed on Opera and Vivaldi using the above link, but if you want to install it on Opera, you'll first have to install it from bit.ly/opera415.

If you need to translate a page to English in Chrome, you can do so without any extensions by right-clicking anywhere and then selecting 'Translate to English'.

FratPark, Madeline and Peru, Web User Forums



Smart Translate offers translations to three languages at once

GENERAL PC

Move the Recycle Bin to the taskbar

I had lots of Desktop shortcuts in Windows Vista and 7, but I prefer to keep my Desktop clear in Windows 10. Initially,



You can add the Recycle Bin to the taskbar and remove it from the Desktop

the Recycle Bin was my only obstacle, because I could not find a way to save it to the taskbar. I could only create a Start Menu item for it – by right-clicking it and selecting 'Pin to Start'. However, I've now discovered how to pin it to the taskbar.

Right-click the Desktop, choose New, then Shortcut and enter `explorer .exe shell:recyclebinfolder` Click Next, name it 'Recycle Bin' and click Finish. Right-click the new shortcut and select Properties, then Change Icon. Type `imageres.dll` in place of 'C:\Windows\explorer.exe', press Enter and scroll to the Recycle Bin icon. Select it, click OK, Apply and OK. You can now right-click the shortcut and select 'Pin to taskbar'.

Once you've pinned the shortcut, simply delete it from the Desktop.

FratPark and lizzygraham, Web User Forums

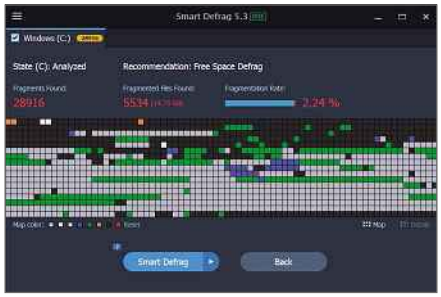
GENERAL PC

Ditch defragging completely

One of the oldest and most common tips for speeding up a PC is to defragment the hard drive but I don't think this advice applies anymore, despite still appearing on many tech websites. New computers often come with a solid-state drive (SSD), which don't need to be defragged and are usually ignored by defragging software. Likewise, if you have upgraded an old PC with a new SSD, you shouldn't defrag it.

Only PCs with mechanical hard drives can possibly benefit from defragmenting. However, Windows has been defragging automatically since Windows 7 and there isn't much benefit in further defragmenting your PC.

Mark Whitaker, via email



Windows defrags PCs automatically, so most don't need extra defrag software

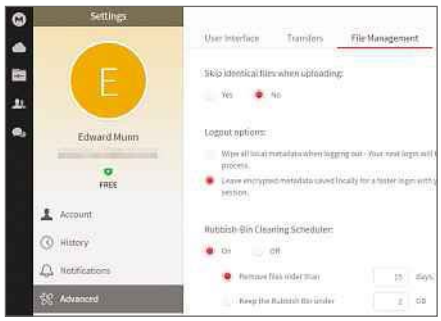
ONLINE STORAGE

Get more space from Mega

If you use Mega (mega.nz) for online storage, it's worth noting that when you delete files they are moved to the rubbish bin, where they continue to count against your free 50GB of space. There's an easy way to solve this. Log into your account and click the settings cog in the bottom-left corner. Select Advanced, then File Management and turn on Rubbish-Bin Cleaning Scheduler. You are presented with two options: to delete items after a set number of days (which I think works best); or to keep the bin under a certain size at all times.

If you use the Megasync Desktop software, its status bar displays the proportion of your storage allowance taken up by your deleted files (which are represented by a green colour).

Jack Gold, Web User Forums



Activate Rubbish-Bin Cleaning Scheduler to stop deleted files using up storage

GENERAL PC

Reset Windows 10 app store

If you are having problems downloading Apps from the Windows 10 Store, this tip I came across recently should help. Open the Command Prompt (press Windows+R, type `cmd` and press Enter), then type `wsreset` and press Enter. This will reset the Store and should resolve the problem.

FratPark, Web User Forums

ANDROID

Use OK Google hands-free

I've been aware of Android's personal assistant for some time, but never really found a use for it beyond setting the occasional alarm. It was only when using Google Maps for satellite navigation in my car the other week that I realised how powerful the hands-free tool can be.

While driving, I tend to play music from my phone using Google Play Music. Operating this while driving is obviously a complete no-no because it takes your eyes off the road, but I found that by saying 'OK Google, skip to the next track' or 'OK Google, pause the music', I could do things that would normally have required me to pull over. In fact, you can even ask Google how long a detour would take by asking "OK Google, how long will it take me to drive to X?" and it'll say the estimated time along with the best route available. Who'd have thought such a tool could be so handy?

Ed Wright, via email

BROWSERS

Manage multiple Google accounts on one PC

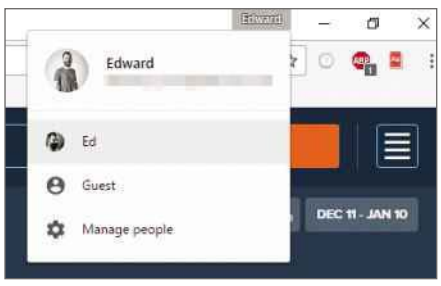
I have two Google accounts – one for work and one for personal matters – and I used to have to switch between them in Chrome using the drop-down menu in the top-right corner of Google sites such as Gmail and YouTube. However, this can become very confusing when you have different accounts open in adjacent tabs, and you can easily end up searching for personal interests on your work account and vice versa. For this reason, I now use Google Chrome's Users tool, which lets you use different accounts in completely separate windows, so that you can clearly see which one is which and avoid muddling them up.

On my work laptop, I first signed into Chrome (from Settings) using my work Google account. To add my home account, I then clicked my name in the top-right corner (next to the minimise button), selected 'Manage people' and Add Person. You're asked to enter a name and choose a profile picture before clicking Save. A window loads asking you to log in with your Google account. Once you've done that, the browser icons in the taskbar (along with the name at the top of Chrome) clearly indicate which account you're using and your bookmarks, passwords and other synced information are loaded for both accounts in their respective windows.

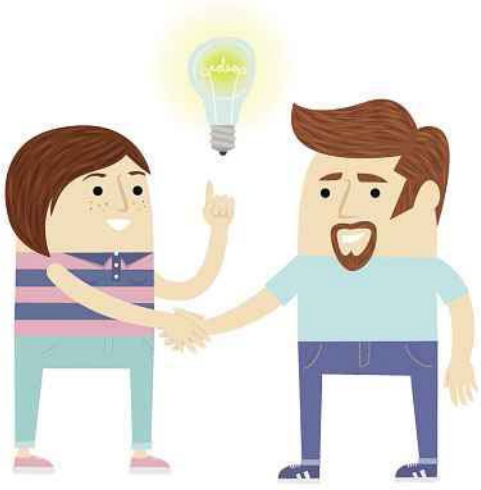
If you need to let a friend or family member access their Google account and browser information on your PC, this is the way to do it. Once they've finished, you can remove them using the 'Manage people' page.

This setting has totally transformed the way I use Chrome and I can now access work and personal services on the same PC without getting muddled.

Tom Riches, via email



Chrome lets you log into multiple Google accounts



Readers' Helpdesk

Our pick of the best solutions posted on our reader forums. Visit forum.webuser.co.uk – it's friendly and free!

GENERAL PC

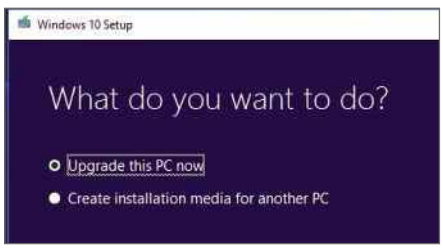
Can I restore my PC to Windows 10?

Q I have a four-year-old PC that came with Windows 7. In early July, I took advantage of the Microsoft Windows 10 upgrade and all was well until a few days ago when the PC wouldn't start up. I used the PC's recovery mode, which took a couple of hours, but it has now reverted back to the original Windows 7. I have backups of everything important but I would like to upgrade again (for free) to Windows 10.

donnyboy36, Web User Forums

A I used the assistive technologies link (bit.ly/assistive415) to upgrade a Windows 7 PC after the deadline, but as your PC has already been upgraded, you could download the Windows 10 media-creation tool (bit.ly/media415) and run it from within Windows 7. Choosing the option to 'Upgrade this PC' should work automatically, even without you entering your license key. It's always handy to have a Windows 10 installation disc available, so you could also select the option to 'Create installation media for another PC' and burn the ISO file to a DVD or USB drive, if you prefer.

Cantrel, Web User Forums



You shouldn't need a license key to upgrade a PC that's been upgraded previously

GENERAL PC

How do I change permissions for my Windows account?

Q Due to a bad fault in Windows 10, I had to reinstall the operating system from scratch. It is now working fine but my wife has somehow been named as the Administrator. Can anyone tell me how I can restore my account as the Administrator?

lawrie, Web User Forums

A If you and your wife already have accounts, you should be able to switch the Administrator rights over by logging into her account and selecting 'Change account type' under User Accounts in Control Panel. From here, select your account and choose 'Change the account type', select Administrator, then click Change Account Type to confirm.

You can have more than one account set to Administrator, but if you want to remove the privileges from your wife's account, simply follow the same instructions, only choose Standard instead of Administrator. If you don't yet have an account, this would explain why your wife's account has defaulted to the Administrator. You can set up a new account for yourself from User Accounts in Control Panel and then change the account types as described above.

Helmut, Bedstor and dave1510, Web User Forums



Change user account types from Control Panel

GENERAL PC

Can I log into Windows without a Microsoft account?

Q I just replaced my motherboard and hard drive, which meant I had to reactivate Windows 10 by signing in with my Microsoft account. However, I now have to do this every time my PC starts. Can I change the login password back to my original non-account one? Or if I do that will my Microsoft password change, too? Also, am I now more open to snooping from Microsoft?

Castman, Web User Forums

A To sign in with a local account, open Settings, select Accounts and under 'Your info' click the link to 'Sign in with a local account instead'. Type the password for your Microsoft account and click Next. Enter your new local user name and password, along with a password hint, then click 'Sign out and finish'. Some information relating to your Microsoft account may still be present, but apps will simply ask for your login credentials before you can access them.



You can set up local accounts instead of logging in with your Microsoft account

Whether you use a Microsoft account or a local one makes little difference to how much data Microsoft collects. To minimise data collection, you simply need to configure Windows 10 appropriately from its Settings.

You might decide that simply changing your password or setting up a PIN for faster login suits you better. To do this, open Settings and Accounts, then click 'Sign-in options' and look for the respective Password and PIN options.

Sneakybeaky, Helmut and DavidNewton, Web User Forums

Inbox

Star Email

Mug winner

Who's to blame for driverless car accidents?

When two cars collide, insurers currently use several 'tests' to decide who was liable and why. These tests evolved over many years and there are various legal authorities to quote. This is particularly true in a situation where it is deemed that a driver was not driving at the time of the accident, due (usually) to a medical condition rendering them unconscious.

Now, with driverless cars, there will obviously be no driver, so who would be regarded at fault for an accident in these circumstances? Perhaps the vehicle that was 'updating' data at the moment of impact? Or perhaps



the vehicle that lost its Wi-Fi connection? Could it be that the vehicle black boxes (presumably they will have something similar to aircraft black boxes?) will be introduced in evidence and computer boffins will argue the difference between one piece of recorded data and another?

I think the legal and insurance industries will be applying a lot of thought to this because it will inevitably mean money for insurers and legal fees for solicitors. And then there is the question of driving licences – could someone, for example, who has been banned from driving (holding or obtaining a driving licence) be able to use a driverless car? It will be interesting to watch these developments.

Alan Lesley-Bayne, via email

A matter of resignation

I'm a regular *Web User* reader and enjoy the excellent content, particularly the consumer campaigning. So Barry's column in Issue 413 (bit.ly/webuser413) reporting on my British Infrastructure Group of MPs (BIG) ('Stop postponing national roaming') got my attention.

Without wishing to appear at all touchy, it's worth mentioning that I didn't actually resign from Cabinet as reported in your piece. I resigned because I felt it was simply the decent thing to do.


Page 404

Stop postponing national roaming

A small gesture to a family who had lost their child. I did it to be honourable in perhaps a rather old-fashioned kind of way. I was therefore surprised to see your article refer to my resignation in quite a different light. It does appear you've rather reflected the *Guardian* perspective rather than the reality.

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, via email

I've fallen in love with Linux



Over the years, I have enjoyed using Windows in its various incarnations, but when I upgraded to Windows 10 from 8. I hated it. Your magazine has been great in helping to sort most of my problems, but I have to ask myself: "do I need an operating system that has seemingly endless problems with it, and do I want to spend time sorting them?". I must answer, "No".

I have just found the solution to my Windows dilemma and it's called Linux. I will still buy and read your magazine, but my three computers will now use Linux. Two have the latest flavour of Mint and my newest is now running Ubuntu. I love it!

Phil Allen, via email

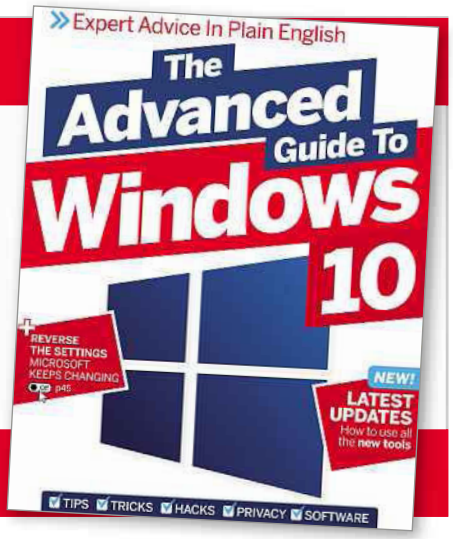
What a Linux surprise!

I nearly fell off my chair and had to rub my eyes when I read a small piece about Linux in *Windows User*. Oh sorry, I mean

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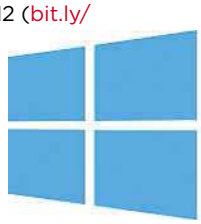
Web User. Did I go temporarily insane or did this really happen? It keeps me amused that your magazine is always slagging off Windows, yet it is full of everything Windows.

Linux rocks. It is easy to install, easy to use and very fast. Windows? Why?

Lee via Linux, Belfast

Windows 10 is appalling

In reply to Nick Matthews' letter about Windows 10 in Issue 412 (bit.ly/webuser412). I have this appalling software installed on my new Acer PC and I have as yet still not been able to set up my email accounts or Bluetooth connectivity.



I have contacted Acer regarding Bluetooth and they have not resolved the problem. As for my email accounts, they can be installed but only at the expense of jeopardising my security.

If you ask 'experts', they love Windows 10, but a lot of my friends hate it. It is *not* user-friendly unless you are PC-savvy. Thank goodness I have an iPad.

Paddy Flanagan, via email

Is the Yahoo hack behind BT spam?

I refer to the recent Yahoo scandal whereby emails that were not genuine were being sent out via Yahoo. The pattern was that the first part of the sender's email address was correct, but the latter – after the '@' – was not from Yahoo but from various sources around the world. These emails were impersonal and contained the dreaded link, which if clicked could take you anywhere.

I recently wrote to you to inform you that Sky used Yahoo as a platform, so these email accounts could be similarly compromised. Now I have received an email, supposedly from a friend, where again the first part of their address was correct but the latter part was nonsense – and, as usual, the message contained the link.

But the worrying thing is that my friend does not have a Yahoo account – he is with BT Internet! So either they also use Yahoo as a platform or their accounts are also now being targeted.

I trust you will pass this on to my fellow readers as cause for concern.

George C Griffiths, via email



***Web User* says:** You're correct that BT does use Yahoo Mail for its email service, which means that some of its customers (as well as those with Sky) may have been affected by the huge hack that was reported last year. Have any other readers received suspicious emails from Yahoo addresses?

A broken Pebble is no big deal

Poor Barry, being forced to live in a world where his Pebble smartwatch might stop working at any moment (Page 404, Issue 414). How will he tell the time or know if he's received a new email? Other than, of course, simply reaching into his pocket and taking out his phone? If an unreliable watch is really all that Barry has to worry about, then he should count his blessings. Such gadgets are a luxury rather than a necessity, and although I sympathise with Barry's annoyance with the manufacturer, surely the bigger concern should be about the Pebble employees who have lost their jobs since the company was bought by Fitbit.



Charles Kelly, via email

Disappointed by File Manager app

Firstly, thanks for producing an insightful and unbiased magazine. I've been an avid reader since the start. However, I recently purchased File Manager for my iPhone (bit.ly/file413) as recommended in Issue 413, page 34. Your write-up states that: "This app lets you take control of files on your phone and iPad as easily as you can on your PC".



Well, the only files I can access are my pictures; all the other files on my phone, such as music and videos, aren't accessible. So I feel your summary was a bit misleading. Keep up the good work.

M Lennox, via email

Much ado about Issue 414

When I read about Radio Garden (radio.garden) in What's New Online in Issue 414 (bit.ly/webuser414), I tried it straight away. It's brilliant – and I found a nice soft-rock station in Cedar Rapids, Iowa – but it's a pity you cannot save the radio stations.

I have not installed any of the fakes you mention in Issue 414's cover feature, but why are some large companies still using Flash Player if it is so easy to hack? The BBC still uses it, as does Racing UK. They both seem to think that on their systems there is nothing wrong with it.

Incidentally, if Barry Collins has a £150 smartwatch he is not very smart. But I agree with what he says about buying something that should work okay, but which you may have problems with if the company goes bust.

Martin Fletcher, Thorpe Hesley



Get a government grant for speedy broadband

In my last email, I expressed the sentiment that *Web User* was about empowering readers with facts. So I bring good news for readers who suffer broadband speeds of less than 2Mbps.

Many government initiatives are loudly trumpeted by politicians but are found to be lacking in any actionable detail. The Better Broadband Subsidy Scheme (which I'd never heard of before) is one of these, having all the attributes of

a deep-state secret and which your readers can now also be a party to simply by typing `not spot` into Google or going to notspotbroadband.com.

Finding out about the "not spot" was the difficult bit. The rest was a doddle and it takes just over a week or so to go through the Ofcom speed checker, get a government BDUK approval code and choose a supplier who will either install satellite broadband or, as I did, the EE 4G satellite service.

If, like me, you have a sub-2Mbps broadband service and no alternative, The BDUK code entitles you to a government contribution of £350 towards fitting an external aerial and associated equipment internally for – in my case and typically – £470. As suggested by EE, I have started with the lowest monthly tariff of £23 per month for a grant-mandatory 12-month contract, which I can extend or upgrade as and when required. For this I get a service that's often much faster than 10Mbps.

Rod Brown, Birkenhead



Why pay a small fortune for broadband?

Your letters page in Issue 412 made me smile. Some people on vast wages pay a small fortune for this internet thing. Oh sure, when they first got it, they probably tried all sorts of things, but now that phase has passed, so why do they continue to pay so much for something they hardly use? Mr Derek Muswell blandly states that he pays £30 a month for his internet access. How much?!

I pay £2.08 to Direct Save for my broadband contract and £11 per month for line rental, and think I'm hard done by. I used to happily use dial-up, but found that after 30 days of non-use, the contract would be terminated without warning. It took almost a year to find out why. At least now – with broadband – it doesn't vanish each time I go to use it.

Hugh Rogers, via email

What you say...

IF FACEBOOK ADDS ADVERTS TO VIDEOS, WILL YOU STOP WATCHING THEM (bit.ly/fbads415)?

Yes, completely. Although it would probably only take days for someone to release a workaround to avoid the adverts.

Rich Grove *@Rich_Grove*

Rarely watch them anyway. This would stop me completely.

Claudia Ridley

Yes, a bit like local news sites that make you watch a 30-second advert before a 10 second video.

Simon Mellor *@Simon9Hops*

I don't see why Facebook should have ads in videos. It makes billions. It's pure greed at the end of the day.

Brian Brown

THE BBC IS PLANNING TO 'REINVENT' THE iPLAYER (bit.ly/iplayer415). WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE?

De-uglify it, and make the search work. I tried searching for a programme and it brought up no results at all.

John Hannibal Swift

Show live sport on it instead of letting Sky show everything. Football would be good.

Paul Emsley

Personally, I don't have a problem with it as it is. It works. And provides almost 100% subtitles, too. That's more than any other on-demand service offers (are you listening, Sky?)

Gary Olsen

1080p HD for live and catch-up.

Martin Phillp

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO MAKE CHILDREN FEEL SAFER ONLINE?

Parents need to up their game and do some research before letting their kids go online.

Chris Cole

The same way we make everything else safer for children: parental supervision. You had the kid, you look after it! I've raised four kids and I made damn sure they didn't go anywhere on the internet without my say-so.

Lee Dodgson

Education is the best method. Kids should be educated about privacy and be taught to use tech accordingly.

goldmaster *@imthegoldmaster*

Educate parents on safety features and how to implement them. The internet will never be child-safe.

Jimmy riddle *@j1mmyr1ddle*

THE iPHONE IS NOW 10 YEARS OLD. IS IT THE BEST GADGET EVER?

Yes. It is so reliable, the apps are just incredible and its design can't be beaten. I'm looking forward to the iPhone 8 – and the next 10 years.

Ramos Fae Samos

Started well, then went downhill. I had a 3G, 4 and 4S – the last decent one. All that followed seemed flimsy. So many broken examples on eBay.

Patrick *@StubCrouch*

Frankly no. The microprocessor that resulted in the first affordable home computers in the Eighties was more important. The best thing about Apple has been its marketing department.

Richard Morgan

No, never seen the need to switch from Android.

Ken Green

IPhones are seriously overrated and always have been.

Gavin Stephen Green

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Barry Collins avoids air rage by using his own tech instead of the plane's disaster movies

Bring your own in-flight entertainment

When you're a six-foot-something lummox like me, there's not much that can make a 10-hour economy-class flight bearable. The in-flight entertainment could be Kylie Minogue flipping peanuts into a top hat in the seat next to me and it still wouldn't make chewing my own knees for 10 hours any more amusing. But if you subjected terror suspects to the current state of so-called 'in-flight entertainment', they'd be begging you to bring back waterboarding.

I'm currently in Las Vegas to check out the latest in technology at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES – see page 36), but the tech aboard the flight that got me here would have been laughed off the show floor when I first started coming 20 years ago.

The in-flight entertainment was delivered via a 6in screen embedded in the headrest in front of me. The display was so pitifully low-resolution that I couldn't honestly testify whether the film I was watching starred Michael Douglas or a cheese grater. Not that the resolution really mattered, because once the inconsiderate dolt in front of me had put his seat back within six seconds of take-off, the limited viewing angles of the screen meant I could only get a clear picture if I stood up.

Even with my expensive set of headphones plugged into the jack in my armrest, I could only get crackly audio in one ear. Although that was a blessing in disguise, because whenever the cabin manager interrupted the in-flight entertainment to make a critical announcement about the mortgage rates for a packet of Pringles, the volume shot up so loud that the woman next to me bashed her knees into her lap tray and showered me in tepid Nescafé.

> "The volume shot up so loud that the woman next to me bashed her knees into her lap tray and showered me in tepid Nescafé"

Even if you could tolerate the 1970s picture quality and fingernails-down-a-blackboard sound, the selection of 'entertainment' was so thin it could model for Versace. In the 'Guilty Pleasures' section, for example, you can watch *MasterChef: The Professionals*, series 8, episode 2. None of the other episodes, just that one. Who in their right mind wants to watch about 5% of a cooking contest from two years ago? That's not a Guilty Pleasure, that's a personality disorder.

Compare and contrast this with the entertainment afforded by the iPad Air in my hand luggage. The 9.4in screen is more than 50% bigger than the electronic postage stamp BA afforded me. I don't know for sure, but I'd guess it has at least 10 times the resolution of the headrest screen, and the touchscreen actually worked without me having to virtually puncture the glass with my finger. The crystal-clear audio had the novelty of coming through in stereo, and wasn't interrupted by eardrum-splitting announcements every 18 minutes. And the tablet had been loaded with tons of choice, high-resolution boxsets downloaded from Netflix, BBC iPlayer and Sky Now before I left.

You don't even need a fancy iPad to bring your own in-flight entertainment: a £50 Kindle Fire tablet from Amazon would provide a far superior experience to anything economy-class cabins have to offer.

Airlines should stop ripping us off and start ripping out their screens. Give us a powered USB socket to keep the batteries topped up and we'll make our own entertainment. It can't be any worse than Greg Wallace tucking into a Chicken Kiev.

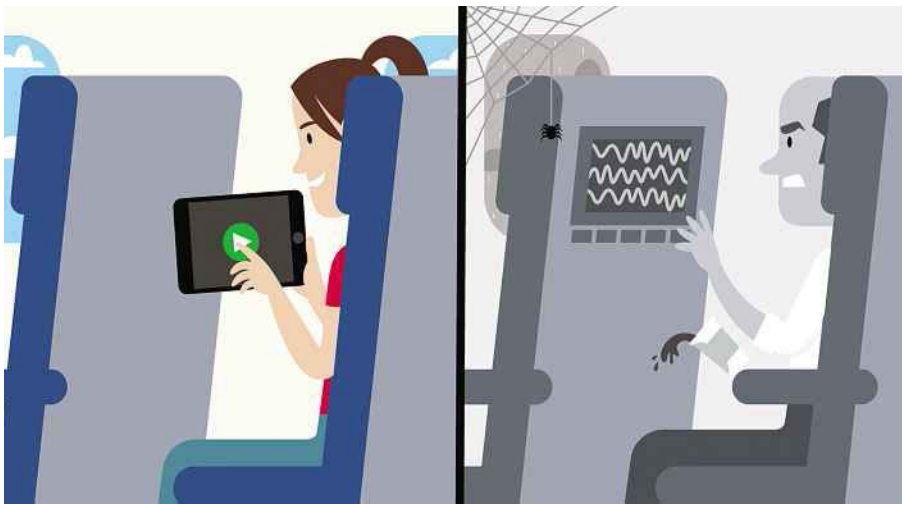


Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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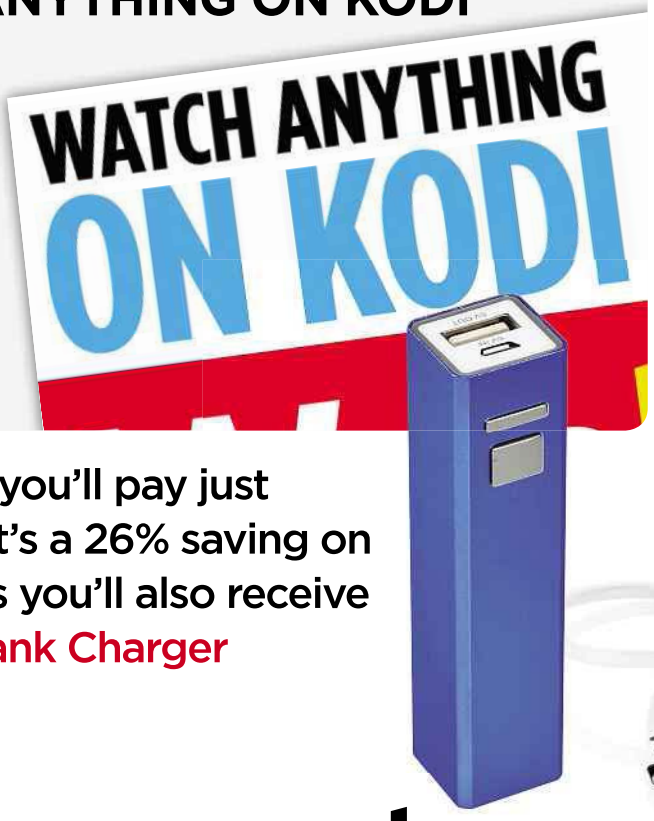
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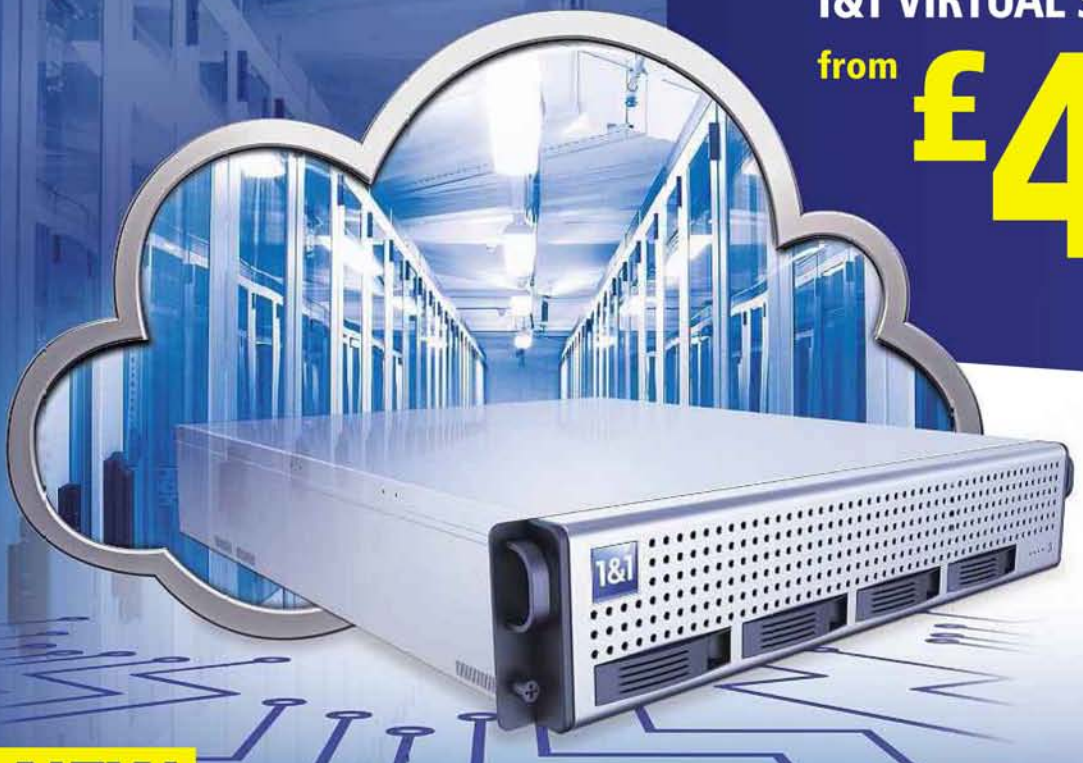
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